

ABSTRACT

PREACHING THE DOCTRINE OF COVENANT AND ITS IMPACT UPON THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF PRAYER

by

John Keith Franklin

The doctrine of covenant has been overlooked as a source for preaching in the church. A sermon series on the doctrine of covenant may positively influence the practice of prayer. This series was preached in the genre of first person biblical characters.

The study describes how a sermon series preached to a local church congregation utilized written responses to measure changes in the cognitive and/or behavioral practice of prayer. This is an evaluation study in the experimental mode, which uses a pre- and posttest design. Qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The Problem and Its Setting

During my time of service as a local United Methodist minister, I have heard this question posed in formal and informal settings: “Pastor, how do I make my faith real?” Pondering that question has led me to try to determine an essential cause of why many people struggle with the Christian faith. Personally I can understand the frustration of those who are seeking ways to grow spiritually on the journey of faith because I am a fellow pilgrim. The role of pastor assumes that one is equipped to help people grow in their faith. My goal is to become more effective as a spiritual guide.

The Doctor of Ministry Program at Asbury Theological Seminary has provided me the context to explore both the theoretical and practical implications of spirituality. A “Seminar in Spiritual Formation” with Reginald Johnson in 1999 provided me with a model for ministry. A cassette recording by Dr. Dennis F. Kinlaw on the life and ministry of Thomas Carruth was an introduction for the class on spirituality:

Tom gave himself to prayer. He gave himself to the “calling” to pray. He believed that there are really two worlds instead of one, and the one that we can’t see and can’t touch is the one that really counts. Modern secular people believe that if you can’t see it or touch it then it really isn’t there. Tom believed it was. Tom Carruth believed that he had instant access to an audience with God. He did this naturally, genuinely, and it was *real* [emphasis mine]. He believed the place to start was on the other side of the line. He believed he had a chance to participate in the “other side” through prayer. He had joy in prayer. Will you give yourself to prayer? (“Kinlaw on Carruth”)

Stephen Seamands, in Holiness of Heart and Life, says, “United Methodists today are being shaped more by the values of American culture than by the values of their Christian faith” (36). The people who come to church for a Sunday morning worship service demonstrate a desire to grow spiritually. The sermon of the pastor may be the

most effective vehicle to impact kingdom values that will positively influence the spiritual life of those who want to connect Christian faith and daily life.

The spiritual discipline of prayer provides the focus for inner transformation as the Holy Spirit nurtures and equips individuals for life in the home, workplace, school, community, and in every relationship where the love and grace of God directs them as an ambassador of Christ. Successful Christian churches are not measured by how many people attend but by the number of people equipped to live out the faith. The question for consideration is: “How do Christians live in covenant?” The Good News of the gospel is that Jesus Christ has faithfully provided for people the covenant relationship established by God. Even when human unbelief causes people to fail to realize the blessings of covenant, Christ will never fail humanity. A preaching series on the doctrine of covenant may provide a practical tool for spiritual direction for individuals and an entire congregation.

Congregational Context

Tryon United Methodist Church is located in Polk County, in the southwest section of North Carolina. The population of Polk County stands at 16,920. Tryon, the largest town in the county, has a population of 1,780. The community is known as a select retirement area and hosts many cultural and equestrian events (Polk County 3).

The United Methodist Church in Tryon has an interesting history since it began in 1897. The people called Methodist have survived organizational setbacks, minority status, and the problem of geographical isolation. The first congregation declined in membership, and the church building was sold to the Congregational denomination. From 1901 to 1906, “circuit riders” preached to the small Methodist congregation in a rented school building. As the congregation grew, a white frame church was built and served the

congregation beginning in 1907. In the 1920s the congregation experienced a second decline in membership. By the 1940s enthusiasm and growth surfaced again, and a parsonage was secured. In 1955 a brick church building was built, and the congregation has since remained stable in terms of organization and membership. The church building was renovated in 1997, and the congregation celebrated a centennial of Methodism in Tryon. In 2002 the congregation added 6,300 square feet of building to modernize and provide additional space to enable outreach ministry of the church.

The current membership of the congregation stands at 260 members with an average worship attendance of 122. The membership and attendance records of the past ten years indicate the church has fewer members than at the beginning of the decade, but the worship attendance is higher (White 124).

Tryon United Methodist Church is now experiencing a period of growth. The increased membership and attendance of the church with families containing children and youth has positively impacted a congregation whose members were primarily enjoying their retirement years. Polk County has thirty-two percent of the population that is sixty years of age or older (Polk County 3).

Most of the congregation's active, formal leadership is drawn from long-term membership. The leadership undertook a self-study eight years ago and projected a five-year plan and has successfully met its goal of attracting new families. The financial stewardship of the congregation is excellent, and the church has dramatically increased the budget for ministry.

Tryon United Methodist Church is ethnically homogenous. The members and constituents are Caucasian. Traditional family structure and extended families are the congregational norm. Members in the congregation have earned over a hundred

undergraduate and graduate degrees. This number is high compared to the figures of Polk County, which indicate only 20 percent of the population may have earned a college degree (Polk County 10).

The congregation's self-perception has been that of a small church that wants to undertake sound new directions for growth. Traditional activities of ordained ministry and providing congregational care have been the primary pastoral role. The congregation, as a whole, has taken the role of passive recipient of ministry. A shifting away from this model has begun. Many within the congregation, especially the more recent worshippers, have begun to understand that they are more than recipients of ministry. They are also called into Christian ministry and have gifts to share. The congregation has an excellent mission statement that is the focus for the church's ministry:

The people of Tryon United Methodist Church seek to answer God's call to be disciples of Christ, to come together for worship and spiritual growth, to share our love for others, and to look beyond ourselves to serve the needs of our church and community.

One of the unique phenomena of this congregation is that whether they are retired or in their prime earning years, on any given Sunday, eight to ten families will be traveling. This means the evidence of "missing" members is very obvious in a congregation this size. The various ministries of the church are affected by the inconsistency of attendance. Worship is the only ministry that attracts up to seventy-five percent of the membership. The factors stated have caused me to search for methods in spiritual formation that would promote vital Christian discipleship. My thesis is that when people more fully understand the doctrine of covenant as presented by sermons on the lives of various biblical characters a paradigm shift may occur in the practice of discipleship that will positively influence prayer life.

The Need for This Study

Living the Christian life in covenant with God is an unknown concept in our time:

According to a recent poll, at least seven out of ten people among your friends, coworkers, and motorists passing you in their vehicles on the freeway say they believe in God. Half of these people also say prayer is important in their daily life. (Mercer 59)

Karl Rahner, in On Prayer, states, “In many cases, a man suffers because of the difference between what his prayer is and what he knows it should be” (54). Roberta Bondi, in To Pray and to Love, says, “Depending upon our church and family traditions, there is a good possibility that we believe it is not even polite to talk about prayer” (9). Understanding these facts provides the preacher an opportunity to influence the spiritual life of a congregation.

Gerald Sloyan states in Worshipful Preaching, “Preaching is an integral part of the worship act. One speaks in the assembly to facilitate the people’s prayer” (15). Christ did not call people to preach but called people to pray. Eugene Peterson, in Earth and Altar, says, “Prayer acts on the principle of the fulcrum, the small point where great leverage is exercised” (22). My purpose is to preach sermons on the doctrine of covenant utilizing the lives of various biblical characters as a way to influence the prayer lives of the congregation. I believe the doctrine of covenant can provide new understanding for every Christian. John Oswalt, in Where Are You, God? states, “The covenant form, especially as adapted by God, emphasized grace and love” (62). The other side of covenantal understanding also must be proclaimed, namely commitment. Richard Foster, in Prayer Treasury, says, “The point of a covenant is commitment—the very thing to which we have such an aversion” (69).

The psalmist expresses a desire to live in covenant:

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell

in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. (Ps. 27:4, RSV)

People desire to respond to God, and prayer is the open door of access to the Holy One. God desires to share the blessings of covenant with humanity. The experience of faith grows as the life of prayer deepens in the life of the individual. The divine partnership has both individual and corporate aspects that can strengthen the body of Christ. This study may provide a method of spiritual formation for individuals and a congregation.

Description of the Project

This project consists of eight spiritual formation sermons preached in the first person character genre over a period of two months. The sermons were preached during the 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. Sunday worship services of the Tryon United Methodist Church. Costuming for each character and staging in the chancel area was developed through the assistance of the Research Reflection Team. I preached all the sermons.

The sermons were developed in first person character style in order to utilize various teaching and learning styles to promote maximum participation of the congregation. A sermon can generally be classified in a didactic or lecture teaching style. The character genre also allowed the congregation to experience additional teaching styles such as demonstration, coaching, and facilitation.

Sermons are generally auditory experiences. The sermons in this series were audio and videotaped to include those who could not be physically present on Sunday. Visual learners were included by the use of overhead projection of biblical scenes including the character at the center of the Scripture. The opportunity for kinesthetic learning was provided by written devotional guides for individual prayer and the invitation to join a small group. The sermons in this series were designed to reach

individuals based on the various strengths of personality such as sensing, feeling, thinking, and intuition.

The first sermon in the series was on the biblical character Noah as a familiar example of God giving a promise to the world by the sign of the bow in the clouds. It introduced the series and explained the concept of covenant. The remaining sermons utilized other Old and New Testament character biographies to model how covenant may positively impact the discipline of prayer. Bulletin inserts were used for outlines and action steps for the week based on the sermons. Daily devotional guides were provided for the congregation's use in study, reflection, and action based on the principles outlined in the sermons. The congregation was given the opportunity to participate in the study.

A scale for the Structure of Prayer was administered anonymously to the congregation and small group with questionnaires in order to establish a baseline for evaluation of the effect of the preaching series. Copies of the forms are included in the appendixes of this paper as well as full manuscripts of the sermons. The scales and questionnaires were administered before and at the completion of the preaching series. Additional questions on the final forms invited the congregation and small group to confirm, partially confirm, or deny the interpretation of my personal observation and the literature review.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the study was to develop and evaluate a sermon series on the doctrine of covenant to impact positively the spiritual discipline of prayer. The genre of preaching chosen was first person biblical characters. In order to accomplish this, a "prayer covenant" was offered to the participants in the study. The research project focused on the changes, if any, from cognitive and/or behavioral practices in the spiritual

discipline of prayer in the congregation and small group. The status of the participants in the study before and after was measured with the criteria of quality of sermons, impact of sermons, and other factors that were discovered and may have influenced the participants' discipline of prayer.

Research Questions

Research Question #1 was developed to measure the following data:

What level of practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer characterized the congregational respondents and small group prior to the implementation of the sermon series?

Research Question #2 was developed to measure the following data:

What changes occurred in the spiritual discipline of prayer of the congregational respondents and small group after the sermon series?

Research Question #3 was developed to measure the following data:

What other intervening variables might correlate with the observed changes in the congregational subjects and small group responses to the preaching series?

Definition of Terms

A covenant is a binding compact between two (or more) parties. The parties desire to express commitment by specific terms. These compacts can be between nations, employees and employers, or even marriage partners. In the Scripture the most important covenants are between God and God's people.

In the Old Testament, covenant was established by the revelation of God to humanity, chiefly through Moses and the giving of the Law. The New Testament gives evidence to the earliest Christian community expressing the meaning of covenant in the life of Jesus Christ. The new covenant both fulfills and supercedes the old. The Scriptures

give witness to the claim that the Law is annulled for the Christian and, at the same time, argue that the Law is fulfilled in love, a love that God makes possible by the justification of a sinner in Jesus Christ.

Covenant is defined as a form of God's revelation of his nature and attributes (Walton 79). The covenant is a promise by God to extend grace to those who believe in the divine revelation of Jesus Christ. The covenant is good news or the gospel for humanity. Covenant is the recognition of God as the one true God and the realization that believers are God's people by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is defined as interaction with God by reaching for and being reached for, of receiving and giving, of hearing and speaking, and sharing (Langford 14). Prayer is communication and can take many forms of expression, such as verbally speaking and silently listening.

Preaching is defined as telling the truth of the gospel in story form (Markquart 141). The master storyteller, Jesus, used metaphors, similes, short stories, and long stories (137). Preaching on biblical characters in the first person genre communicates the gospel in a way that might appeal to people and their universal love of story.

Methodology

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the changes, if any, in cognitive and/or behavioral practices of the discipline of prayer in the congregational respondents and a small group of worship participants at the Tryon United Methodist Church as a result of an eight-sermon series on the doctrine of covenant, preached on biblical characters in the first person genre over a period of two months. This was an evaluative study in the experimental mode utilizing a pre- and posttest design.

Subjects

The subjects of this study were 104 congregational respondents and eleven volunteers for a small group from those who attended the 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. Sunday worship services at the Tryon United Methodist Church at least twice each month. Every adult (age eighteen or older) who fitted the worship criteria had an equal opportunity to participate in the congregational responses and volunteer small group.

A small group of volunteers from the congregation participated in this study. The group consisted of eleven volunteer adult laypersons who have been Christians for more than five years and were self-motivated to explore a deeper journey with God and the life of prayer. The small group provided an environment that created a better atmosphere for people to become vulnerable and open to responding to the sermon series.

Variables

The independent variable of this research project was the sermon series. Eight sermons were preached over a two-month period. The biblical text directed the content of each sermon. I chose to preach this series in the genre of first person characters to heighten the listeners' receptivity to the message.

The dependent variables of this study were the cognitive and behavioral changes in relation to the practice of prayer. Intervening variables that might have influenced or helped to explain outcomes include age, gender, number of years as a Christian, and number of years attending the Tryon United Methodist Church.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The questionnaire including the "Structure of Prayer Scale" developed by Luckow, Ladd, Spilka, McIntosh, Parks, and Laforett (qtd. in Hill and Hood 70) was used as a quantitative approach to measure the effects of the sermon series in the lives of the

congregational respondents and small group. The pre-sermon series questionnaire was administered to the subjects two weeks prior to the beginning of the sermon series. The questionnaire served as a pretest to provide a baseline reading on the respondents' knowledge and feelings about the doctrine of covenant and the spiritual discipline of prayer. The study measured the changes, if any, from the prior understanding of the doctrine of covenant and spiritual discipline of prayer to a new state of understanding covenant and the spiritual discipline of prayer due to the treatment.

The small group met weekly and utilized the bulletin inserts and daily devotional guides taken from the sermons as a qualitative approach in order to discuss covenant and the possible effect upon the spiritual discipline of prayer. Process notes and anecdotes were gathered from the participants out of group sessions and informal interviews with each subject.

The final administration of the questionnaire took place immediately following the eighth and last sermon in the series. This post-series questionnaire was identical to the pre-series questionnaire with one addition. At the end of the questionnaire a series of blank lines were provided with an invitation to respondents to record any thoughts, feelings, or reflections they wanted to share as participants in the study.

Confidentiality was assured by the use of respondent-created codes. At the administration of each questionnaire, the respondents were instructed to re-create the same code. This method of coding allowed me to track changes in the individual respondents over time as well as note the composite for the entire sample.

The questionnaire served as the primary source of data collection for the cognitive and behavioral variables. The process notes and anecdotal material from the small group also provided data for the study.

Delimitations and Generalizability

The motivation to engage in this research emerged as a result of my desire to grow as a pastor and to influence the spiritual life of Tryon United Methodist Church positively. My thesis was that the prayer life of church members might be influenced by a preaching series focusing on the doctrine of covenant. The study was limited to the worship participants of this local United Methodist congregation of 260 with an average weekly worship attendance of 122. I can generalize similar outcomes, if any, if the study is replicated in a congregation of similar size, demographic makeup, and attitudinal openness toward the proposed research project and preacher.

The sermon was the chosen format (independent variable) for this particular study. The congregational respondents and small group provided additional information on how the series strengthens the congregation's cognitive and behavioral practices in the spiritual discipline of prayer. Scripture was the source of the homiletical content. I assumed a favorable response when biblical passages on the doctrine of covenant and prayer were shared in a way that faithfully communicates the meaning of the biblical text in a manner that engaged the listeners and invited their response.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 of this work establishes the biblical, theological, and homiletical context for the study. The research design is presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 reports the research findings. Chapter 5 provides a summary and interpretation of the research findings. It also offers suggestions for further inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENTS IN THE LITERATURE

The first factor contributing to my interest in covenant is the Bible and the promises of God to humanity. “The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant” (Ps. 25:14, RSV). I believe many Christians misunderstand the kind of relationship God desires to have with them. God is not their enemy; he wants to be their *friend*. The word “fear” also causes a number of negative reactions concerning God. In this context, fear is not fright or terror but awe, respect, admiration, and love, as we have for a parent.

The second factor is a lack of emphasis by the Church on the grace of God. We find little theological underpinning for daily life. Church may be a ritual that is endured without the understanding of the doctrine of covenant. Sin is humanity’s nature by the Fall, and the new covenant in Christ is God’s remedy for sin in every life and the power to remain in relationship with him.

The third factor contributing to my interest is a perceived cultural bias against Christianity. I believe a deeper understanding of God’s covenants will bless the members of the church and help them live more victorious lives. When the world sees abundant life resident in a Christian this defeats a denial of the reality of God and the power of grace. Jesus Christ is the mediator of the covenant, and others will want to follow the one who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6, RSV).

Covenant

My study of the Bible has yielded twenty-nine direct references to covenant. Understanding the Old Testament covenants is a necessary foundation to reap the greatest blessing of the New Testament covenant. The primary issue is understanding how all the

covenants of God are interrelated and how each contributes to the fulfillment of the new covenant in Jesus Christ. I have developed a theology of covenant based on the Scriptures and major Christian theologians.

A covenant is a binding compact between two parties. The Hebrew word in the Old Testament is *berit* which means a promise (Walton 14). A binding between covenant partners that signifies two people had become one (Frangipane 47). When God entered into a covenant relationship with man, he sovereignly instituted a life-and-death bond in blood (Robertson 4). Eichrodt describes it as a *living process* in order to reveal a divine reality that is unique in religion (14). This was the formulation of a national faith at its deepest level, which defined Israel (14).

A solemn promise is made binding by an oath (Buttrick, Interpreter's Dictionary 714). Throughout the Scriptures we find the record of God's activity in covenant and its meaning: "I shall be your God, and you shall be my people" (Robertson 34; Lev. 26:12). Covenant is a form of God's revelation of his nature and attributes (Walton 79).

The corresponding word in the New Testament Greek is *diatheke*, meaning unilateral agreement (Gentz 229). In Latin the term is *foedus*. Another rendering is the term "testament," thus our terms Old and New Testament.

God's promise to Noah after the Flood is called a covenant (Gen. 9; Jer. 33:20). Scripture records an account of God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17), of the covenant of the priesthood (Num. 25:12, 13; Deut. 33:9; Neh. 13:29), and of the covenant of Sinai (Exod. 34:27; Lev. 26:15), which was afterwards renewed at different times in the history of Israel (Deut. 29; Josh. 24; 2 Chron. 15:23; 29; 34; Ezra 10; Neh. 9).

In conformity with human custom, God's covenant is said to be confirmed with an oath (Deut. 4:31; Ps. 89:3) and to be accompanied by a sign (Gen. 9:17). So the

covenant can be called God's "counsel," "oath," or "promise" (Ps. 89:3, 4; 105:8-11; Heb. 6:13-20; Luke 1:68-75). God's covenant consists wholly in the bestowal of blessing (Isa. 59:12; Jer. 31:33, 34, Quick Verse).

Christians find many ways to view the covenants in Scripture. Robertson has the following list: "Noah: the covenant of preservation; Abraham: the covenant of promise; Moses: the covenant of law; David: the covenant of the kingdom; and Christ: the covenant of consummation" (61). One basic element in the whole of covenant experience is: *the factual nature of the divine revelation* (Eichrodt 37). God gave Moses the name, "I am that I am" which said that God would be present and ready to act (190).

The Abrahamic covenant with Israel by God called the people to be an instrument through which the Gentiles would be blessed (Pink 93). The *grace* of the Abrahamic covenant and the *law* of Moses were mutually beneficial because both were designed to secure a common end (Pink 166). Andrew Murray called the old covenant an elementary school of grace to prepare for the fullness of Christ (The Two Covenants 32). The failure of Israel to keep covenant demonstrated the need for that which was perfect in Christ (Pink 178).

Ritual is associated with covenant making. In some instances a sword would be passed between the participants to signify that each party would assume an enemy of one of the partners was their enemy as well. Another ceremony was passing a sandal from one partner to the other. This symbolized that each committed to travel as far as possible to stand with the covenant partner. The most widely used covenant ritual was for an animal to be sacrificed to God and then the body of the animal split into halves (Frangipane 4-48). In the Old Testament, the phrase "to make covenant" literally reads "to cut a covenant" (Robertson 8). A universal understanding about the use of blood in

covenant communicates the feelings of the soul (Coleman 10). Berrigan says covenant leads people inward to the extinction of sufficiency and pride (208).

When Israel entered into the divine covenants with God, a fresh ordering of their life occurred (Eichrodt 70). Wrath was not one of the permanent characteristics of God, but holiness and righteousness continue even into the new covenant (262). God no longer remembers sin under the new covenant, and the threat of punishment is eliminated (McComiskey 88). God obligates himself by oath to supply all the power to fulfill the conditions of the covenant (Wilkerson 47).

A common bond exists between Israel and the old covenant and the people of the new covenant in that each was created to fulfill God's purpose in community (Buchanan 111). Each covenant created a people of God, who had been no people, by blood and the demand of complete self-surrender to God (Buttrick, Interpreter's Dictionary 723). A common inheritance of promise is shared by the people of both covenants (McComiskey 189).

The following is a comparison of the old and new covenants:

<u>Old Covenant</u>	<u>New Covenant</u>
written on tables of stone	written on human hearts
a written code	Spirit of the living God
kills	gives life
a dispensation of death	dispensation of the Spirit
condemnation	righteousness
fading	permanent
veiled glory	direct view of God's glory (Hillers 183).

In the New Testament, the word for covenant may also mean a last will and

testament that is inoperative until after the testator's death (Coleman 100). The death of the Messiah or covenanter is in a form that no other covenant has or can ever have (Pink 277). Christ's death is the mediation of a gracious blessing of justification and holiness for all that are under the covenant (McComiskey 160). The first Christians believed that the fulfillment of God's Old Testament promises had begun with Jesus and the experience of the Spirit (Fee 50).

God pledges four things through the new covenant:

1. He swears to write his law in hearts and minds;
2. He takes an oath that he will be God, and we will be his children;
3. He promises he will be known and his ways will be known through the Holy Spirit; and,
4. He promises to be merciful to unrighteousness, forgiving sin and iniquity (Wilkerson 84).

God's purpose was to *recover a lost humanity from the devil's power* (Wilkerson 15).

God exercises his power on the enemies of his covenant people (Eichrodt 462). The power of God gives an outward and inward moral purity to those who belong to the covenant (137). The blessing of covenant comes by following the example of Ezekiel and "praying" the covenant (Wilkerson 66).

Jesus certainly prayed to the Father in order to fulfill the covenant. He was identified with the Lord's beloved, the Lord's servant (Buchanan 304). Christ took upon himself the curses of the covenant and died in the place of the sinner (Robertson 12). Jesus is heir of all things and that includes the covenant (Hillers 179). He is executor and administrator of the covenant (Pink 278). Our life is in him in every condition, and he is the source of all happiness (55). The living presence of Jesus in Christians is the clearest

evidence of covenant (Berrigan 121). Christ the mediator is worthy and dependable, and he has all the resources to help us keep the covenant. Keeping covenant is accomplished through faith in Jesus (Wilkerson 85).

Every time a person experiences a rainbow, there is a reminder that the Lord is a covenant-keeping God (Frangipane 53). Circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant promises to Abraham (Pink 53). Baptism is the symbol of union with Christ in death and being raised to new life promised in the covenant (Buchanan 117). A comparison of the biblical rites can show the significance of the covenant of grace in Christ:

Old Covenant

New Covenant

circumcision

baptism

Passover

Eucharist (Oden 108).

Jesus inaugurates the new covenant at the institution of the covenantal meal in the Lord's Supper (Robertson 43). Szikszai says it is "new" in two senses of the word: a renewal of the Old Covenant and an element of unheard-of-newness (121). A dramatic moment came when Jesus lifted the cup for it heralded the establishment of the new covenant with all its blessings, greater than the old covenant could have given (McComiskey 155).

The covenant of grace is the glorious inheritance bestowed on the people of God through the mediation of Christ (McComiskey 191). Grace is God's initiative in the promise of redemption. Grace was announced as a gift by his word not because humanity deserved grace but because God is merciful (Coleman 97). The covenant of grace has its eternal place in the three persons of the Godhead (Bryant 150). Christians receive the covenant by faith as the fruit of obedience (Pink 188). Humanity is claimed and called to

surrender with no reservations (Eichrodt 45). Every person must fall back on God's creative love, which transcends all human thought (254). Forgiveness of sin is a blessing of the new covenant initiated by the blood of Christ (McComiskey 155). The majority of the New Testament focuses on the issue of salvation (Walton 154). The truth holds in that God saves none except those who are in covenant relationship with him (Pink 284).

The covenant is the will of the Godhead and the eternal plan of redemption with the conditions met by the three persons, largely by the Father and the Son (John 17:4, 6, 9; Isa. 42:6; Ps. 89:3). On the part of the Father, these conditions are met:

1. all needful preparation to the Son for the accomplishment of his work (Heb. 10:5; Isa. 42:1-7);
2. support in the work (Luke 22:43); and,
3. a glorious reward came in the exaltation of Christ when his work was done (Phil. 2: 6-11), and the covenant was committed into his hands (Matt. 28:18; John 1:12; 17:2; Acts 2:33), and this resulted in the final salvation of all his people (Isa. 35:10; 53:10, 11; Jer. 31:33; Tit.1:2).

On the part of the Son the conditions were:

1. his becoming incarnate (Gal. 4:4, 5);
2. as the second Adam his representing all his people, assuming their place and undertaking all their obligations under the violated covenant of works (1 Cor.15:45);
3. obeying the law (Ps. 40:8; Isa. 42:21; John 9:4, 5); and,
4. suffering its penalty (Isa. 53; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13) in their stead.

Christ, the mediator, fulfills all its conditions on behalf of his people and dispenses to them all its blessings. In Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24, this title is given to Christ (Quick Verse).

In the new covenant people live by the spirit rather than the law, and the Spirit dictates how to conduct your life (Buchanan 135). The Holy Spirit is the seal of the new covenant (Pink 53). Love comes from the fruit of the spirit. If a person truly loves the covenant Lord, then they will give sincere affection and express it in loyal service (Hillers 154). Eichrodt says that the possibility of the establishment and maintenance of covenant rests on the presence of *hesed* (love) (232). This is divine loving kindness (235). The parable of Hosea demonstrates the *irresistible power of a love as the ultimate basis of the covenant relationship* (251). In the New Testament, Paul affirmed that the work of the Spirit in the new covenant has surpassed the glory of the old covenant (McComiskey 80). A significant Scripture passage about *hesed* is found in 1 Corinthians 13, known as the “hymn of love.”

The state of the heart is the hinge on which new covenant life begins (Murray, The Two Covenants 42). Faith resting on the mediator of the new covenant means one enters into life, and Paul is the perfect example of that kind of life (52). People are either alive in the new covenant with their names written in the Book of Life or dead because they refused the covenant community (Buchanan 120). The early Christian Church was called the “Way,” meaning the right way to walk for those who wanted to enter new life (132).

The covenant became an affirmation of loyalty, a code of conduct, a pledge of allegiance (Hillers 149). A divine *promise* was made that pledged the sanctification of God’s people and their preservation in a state and course of holiness to their final salvation (Pink 282). Christians have become the New Israel by God’s divine power in order to give him glory (Frangipane 50). When Christians are in covenant with God, they can cease striving; and can rest from the struggle concerning God’s plan for life

(Frangipane 49). The modern Church may benefit from the overlooked blessings available through the doctrine of covenant.

One of the best examples of this truth lived out is the witness of John Wesley. He was influenced by Puritan thinking, particularly J. and R. Alleine (Wakefield 99). Wesley adopted one of Alleine's moral covenant prayers as recorded in "A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition":

I am no longer my own, but thine.
 Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
 Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
 Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
 exalted for thee or brought low by thee.
 Let me be full, let me be empty.
 Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
 I freely and heartily yield all things
 to thy pleasure and disposal.
 And now, O glorious and blessed God,
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
 thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
 And the covenant which I have made on earth,
 let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.
 (United Methodist Hymnal 607)

The components of the covenant prayer can be further explained in contemporary terms such as surrender, God's call, acceptance, status, emptiness, addictions, and yielding (Beasley-Topliffe iii).

The cross of Jesus helps a person understand what Robertson calls "the covenant of consummation" (61). The blood of Jesus has the power to "extinguish our sufficiency and pride" (Berrigan 208). God adopts a person as his child at the expense of his Son's life. The gospel communicates a way for humanity to begin to understand what Paul says in Ephesians 3:17-19:

[A]nd that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; you being rooted and grounded in love, that you may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to

know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God. (RSV)

Eichrodt called this: “a new state of the soul” (505).

The scandal of the cross is that God, the infinite creator, became a perfect sacrifice for the sake of the twisted human soul. By the cross and the empty tomb, Jesus defeated Satan once and for all time as Paul says in Colossians 3:13-15:

And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him. (RSV)

The symbols of this relationship are the sacraments of Christian baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The Scripture declares that God entered into a covenant relationship with humanity, and the sacraments are windows of understanding the death and resurrection of Jesus, where God fulfilled the prophecy of the new covenant and called forth the Church as a servant community (Jer. 31:33-34; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

The sacrament of baptism is how the Church declares that Christians are bound in covenant to God. Baptism symbolically initiates people into the covenant. The covenant connects God, the community of faith, and the person being baptized; all three are essential to the fulfillment of the baptismal covenant. The faithful grace of God is the initiator of the covenant relationship and the enabler of community and the human response of faith.

In the Lord’s Supper Christians share a sacrament by which God becomes present, reminding the believer of what has been done in the gift of his Son. People of faith view this largely as a memorial service where the whole story of his suffering, death, and resurrection was given for humanity. All people receive an invitation to the

repentance of sin and a new invitation to live in love with God and neighbor. Grace is present in the sacrament, and believers receive as a gift the power of the Holy Spirit to live a new life in Christ. Christians are then bound together with the fellowship of the church triumphant and militant. People of faith receive the promise of Jesus: “Lo, I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20, RSV).

The key to understanding covenant is the Holy Spirit. No person in their own strength can live the Christian life. A key biblical figure to illustrate this is the prophet Ezekiel:

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. (Ezek. 36:26-27, RSV)

The lesson for Christians is that this is God’s work, not theirs. They cannot will a new heart or the presence of the Holy Spirit. A scene in the life of Ezekiel from which humanity can gain a lesson: the valley of “dry bones.” God’s Spirit entered the dry bones and caused them to take on sinews and flesh, but they were still dry bones. Not until Ezekiel *prophesied* to the wind did the Spirit come. “So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great host” (Ezek. 37:10, RSV).

The passage of Ezekiel 37:14, “And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and have done it, says the Lord” (RSV), has been translated by David Wilkerson as “I’m going to bring you to a place of absolute firmness in your faith. It will be solid ground, where nothing can shake your spirit” (67). The translation of this Scripture gives a great promise to the preacher and those who hear sermons.

Another important aspect of faith is found in the term *shalom*. This has been

understood as the word for peace. Shalom is God's plan, meaning a life of wholeness and blessing from God. Humanity can find real peace in Jesus Christ. He is the personal exemplar of "shalom." His life of selfless love and servanthood embodied the power of God. Jesus gave evidence that in him our lives would receive freedom from darkness and we would walk in the light of God's mercy and grace.

The cross represents the sword that pierces the armor of powers and principalities. A ritual for early people of faith used a sword passing between two covenant partners showing that the enemy of one is the enemy of both partners. In Jesus' death on the Cross, a person can see the covenant partner who gave the sword as representing the length that the covenant partner was willing to go on behalf of the other. In the Lord's Supper, a person can see the body and blood of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb divided in two and God's making the covenant agreement valid by his walking between the two halves with the torch of the Holy Spirit.

The covenant of marriage also provides insight into the biblical doctrine of covenant. A remarkable passage is found in Isaiah 62:4:

You shall no more be termed Forsaken [Azubah], and your land shall no more be termed Desolate [Shemamah]; but you shall be called My delight is in her [Hephzibah], and your land Married [Beulah]; for the Lord delights in you, and your land Married [Beulah]; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. (RSV)

Marriage can be seen as a symbolic relationship in which Christ is in covenant with humanity. Just as the marriage covenant is the highest form of love a person can know in this life, the New Covenant reveals that Jesus Christ is the bridegroom, and Christians, the Church, are the bride.

The phrase "living process," borrowed from Eichrodt, may help people more clearly grasp the meaning of covenant. As individuals that are at various stages in their

journeys spiritually, this idea can help communicate the fact they are not complete.

People are very interested in personal growth and reading books, attending conferences, and seeking information on how to grow in every area of life.

The hunger for spiritual matters gives the Church a unique opportunity to teach that covenant *is not* a contract. The world is full of failed contracts. A contract is an agreement between two parties. Covenant means a binding compact between God and God's people. God initiates covenant and stipulates all the provisions. People have the choice of accepting or rejecting but not of offering alternative plans or conditions. Covenant requires obedience. "The covenant is God's way of teaching the truth about Himself in everyday life" (Oswalt 62).

Prayer

Prayer is a mysterious conversation with the living God. Dialogue with God can take on many forms as people move toward wholeness and discover the will of God. They cannot state exactly how they know that prayer works, but when they come by faith, God hears them.

Kenneth Leech said that "to pray is to enter into a relationship with God, but it is a relationship in which we stand within a great human movement" (132). Foster says, "Loving is the syntax of prayer. To be effective pray-ers, we need to be effective lovers" (3). Kenneth Swanson said that "how we think about God shapes our experience of God, and our experience of God changes how we think about him" (22).

John Wesley called prayer "the grand means of drawing near to God" (qtd. in Harper 19). Donald Demaray says, "Sometimes prayers cannot be reduced to words; one simply stays quiet in the presence of God with the needy person in view" (43). Prayer is

essentially the communication between a child and father (Brown 53). The presence of God is greater than words (Mercer 48).

People want a place to rest their minds and heart, and the only place to rest is in God through prayer (Jeremiah 14). Prayer is probably the most disciplined and difficult exercise in a Christian's life (Arthur 111). The whole subject of prayer can be baffling and painful (Bondi 8). "Real prayer comes not from gritting our teeth, but from falling in love" (Foster 3).

Most people have an idea of what they are supposed to be doing when they are praying. Christian prayer sets Christ in the center of attention, and his light judges, transfigures our lives (Buttrick, Prayer 174). People have no knowledge of God apart from the sustained act of prayer (Barth 9). Prayer is necessary for the highest part of human nature and the soul (Rahner 9). Real prayer challenges a person's reservations, gives guidance, and draws them into the work of the kingdom (Steere 82).

Prayer is largely made up of four acts, two of which are people's, and two of which are God's: first, the person speaks, second, God listens, third, God speaks, and, fourth, the person listens (Wangerin 29). Eugene Peterson says these elements exist in prayer "awareness and intensification, expansion and deepening at the conjunction of heaven and earth, God and neighbor, self and society" (22). God speaks in prayer: "Behold, he prayeth" (Chadwick 11).

Prayers affect three different spheres—the divine, the angels, and humanity (Bounds 22). A person's time in prayer allows them to accomplish more than any other activity that demands their strength and time (Torrey, Power of Prayer 28). Prayer is the master strategy of God to defeat Satan (Duewel 25). When we pray we are praying not on our own claim upon God, but on the claims of Christ (Torrey, Power of Prayer 50).

The enemy uses all power to cause people to neglect prayer (Murray, The Prayer Life 27). God invites humanity to prayer in the form of dance—a celebration of who he is and the meaning of forgiveness and heaven (Brown 132). The New Testament book of Acts is a commentary on the activity and results of prayer (Cedar 7).

Preaching

The two values foundational to this study's approach to preaching are faithfulness in communicating the biblical message and communication of the biblical message by preaching on biblical characters in the first person genre. Knowledge of the Bible and the biblical witness of covenant were communicated by the sermons in order to promote the spiritual discipline of prayer.

“There are for many people at least two worlds in the Christian life, one our everyday reality and the other the reality called church” (Sloyan 11). The sermon is a powerful tool to help the preacher connect the “two worlds” of those who listen. Dennis Kinlaw says, “Every preacher should be in some measure an interpreter of where man is before God” (Preaching in the Spirit 74). Henry Mitchell says, “The goal must be to plant the ideas in the *totality* [original emphasis] of human consciousness, which begets matching behavior as well as belief” (147).

My goal as a preacher is to keep in mind what John Wesley said:

I design plain truth for plain people: Therefore, of set purpose, I abstain from all nice and philosophical speculations; from all perplexed and intricate resources; and, as far as possible, from even the show of learning, unless in sometimes citing the original scripture. I labour to avoid all words which are not easy to be understood, all which are not used in common life; and, in particular, those kinds of technical terms that so frequently occur in Bodies of Divinity; those modes of speaking which men of reading are intimately acquainted with, but which to common people are an unknown tongue. (Wesley, Fifty-Three Sermons 12)

The preacher must remember that the sermon is not a Bible lecture with an

emphasis on content; it is a word from the Lord with the emphasis on intent (Wiersbe 244). My intent is to communicate with each sermon that the Lord desires a step of faith on the part of preacher and hearer. The immediate action is prayer (Sloyan 56).

The gospel is meant to describe the fact that God has done something for the world that offers salvation for everyone (English 105). The incarnation is the model for preaching because Jesus perfectly showed God to humanity because the Word took on flesh in a contemporary situation (Fant 29). A person can see how the gospel is relevant in every life because of these six fundamental strands: event, interpretation, projection, testimony, application, and invitation (English 83-85).

Markquart says, “Wilder, Craddock, Davis, Achtemeier, Mitchell, Buechner, and others are correct: the very nature of the gospel is that it is communicated in the form of stories, analogies, and narratives; our preaching needs to be the same” (135). Human beings love truth expressed through story form. The preacher has the opportunity to be a raconteur of the gospel (138).

Stories remind people of God’s trustworthiness in keeping his promises. Preaching is an act of hope because of the trustworthiness of God to keep promises (English 126). God still comes and speaks to humanity by the faithful proclamation of his word in the power of the Holy Spirit (Duduit 95). A person of faith can see God revealing himself in the event of making covenant, and this discloses his grand design or plan for all human beings (Stokes, Theology for Preaching 232). Doctrine and life need to be shown as inseparably bound up together in sermons (Farmer 105).

The sermon challenges human will, calls for a decision, and offers the hearer a personal relationship with God (Farmer 15). Preaching is a pivotal activity to God’s saving, divine purpose (11). The gospel story is an invitation to identify and participate in

God's story (English 122). While preachers cannot present God to the hearer, they can point people to that reality (Stapelton 89). A cumulative effect of leverage and influence is experienced by those who obey God (Kinlaw, Preaching in the Spirit 112).

The preaching of the gospel gives pictures about life that become mirrors, and finally, windows (Wiersbe 52). All are searching for ways to understand life and gain insight and a better vision of God. Bible biography gives the opportunity to teach theology, history, and practical godly living (238). The power of the Christian message is that it is concrete and relevant (Farmer 96). Preachers can galvanize the hearers to act first in prayer and then in service to others (Sloyan 44). To be Christian is to pray, decide, and act as followers of Jesus (71).

Survey Research

A questionnaire was the basic instrument of gathering data to measure the knowledge of the congregational respondents and small group about the doctrine of covenant for practicing of the spiritual discipline of prayer, as well as for recording the reaction to the sermon series. The one hundred four congregational respondents and small group of eleven volunteers, were a sample of the entire population, and their responses were used to extrapolate findings (Krathwohl 351). A sample of the non-responding subjects was made to check for possible bias (Borg and Gall 221). The questionnaire was tailored to the population of Tryon United Methodist Church, yet the research can be repeated in a similar congregation (Clark and Boser 8).

Every attempt was made to allow the respondents to the survey questionnaire to express what they say they want concerning the discipline of prayer as well as what they think is true concerning the doctrine of covenant. The preaching series provided the

means to measure their behavior and attitudes concerning the doctrine of covenant and the practice of prayer (Dillman 80).

Summary

The Old and New Testaments present God's gracious gift to humanity in the form of covenant love. God has promised humans he will always be with them in a relationship of blessing. Signs of the covenant promise most clearly seen in the life of Jesus Christ and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

The Reformation was marked by an emphasis on faith. The human response to the offer of grace is clearly seen by the development of the "Covenant Prayer" by Richard Alleine and made popular by John Wesley. An emphasis on the Holy Spirit was rightly seen as the power for the believer to participate in the covenant relationship. Preaching has largely been the instrument that the Church has employed to equip the believer and to reach out to the unbelieving world.

Prayer is the spiritual discipline that is universally employed by individuals to experience the certainty of communion with God. The struggles of a life of prayer may be lessened when transformed from rigid models of work to the flow of prayer as dancing with God. A sermon series on biblical characters in the first person genre living out covenantal life with God suggests that individuals can deepen their practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The disciplines of spiritual formation can enrich the Christian lives of those who want to grow in faith. When parishioners seek practical help in their spiritual journeys, they often look to the pastor. Resources concerning spiritual formation issues abound, yet the pastor will always be wise to point the inquirer back to the Bible because it contains the most definitive resources. A sermon series demonstrating the doctrine of covenant and how this enables a person to grow in the spiritual discipline of prayer is a resource for the pastor and parishioner.

A biblical study of the doctrine of covenant could appear overwhelming and time consuming to the average church member. The pastor has a unique opportunity to communicate the principles of covenant by preaching sermons that utilize biblical characters to demonstrate how to enjoy a deeper relationship with God through prayer.

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the changes, if any, in cognitive and/or behavioral practices in the discipline of prayer in the congregational respondents and small group of worship participants of the Tryon United Methodist Church as a result of an eight-sermon series on the doctrine of covenant preached over a period of two months.

Research Questions

The purpose statement of this study separates into two components: the sermon series itself and the outcomes in the lives of those who have heard the sermons. The research questions that guide the study are reflective of these two components. The first research question identifies the congregational respondents and small group's level of practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer prior to the implementation of the sermon

series. The second research question focuses on the changes that occurred in the spiritual discipline of prayer after the sermon series. The third research question examines what other intervening variables might correlate with the observed changes in the congregational questionnaires and small group's responses to the preaching series.

Research Question #1

What level of practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer characterizes the congregational respondents and small group prior to the implementation of the sermon series?

The answer to this research question provides a baseline reading of the congregational respondents' and small group's understanding of the doctrine of covenant before the introduction of the independent variable, which for this study is the series of eight sermons on the doctrine of covenant. Without this reading I could not determine how much, if any, change occurred in the congregational respondents' and small group's knowledge and behavior in relation to covenant and the spiritual discipline of prayer.

A number of themes emerge as a result of studying the biblical texts that relate to the doctrine of covenant. First, covenant is a promise of God given to provide blessing. Second, covenant is the expression of relationship with God. A relationship with God influences how a person feels and thinks about God. From the standpoint of preaching on the doctrine of covenant, the reverse may also be true: "How people think about God shapes how they feel about and relate to God" (Swanson 22). Third, a relationship with God by the gift of covenant and understanding this theological issue may impact the spiritual discipline of prayer.

Research Question #2

What changes occur in the spiritual discipline of prayer of the congregational

respondents and small group after the sermon series?

This research project was built on the premise that a preaching series on the doctrine of covenant utilizing biblical characters in the first person genre encourages the spiritual discipline of prayer. The preaching literature reviewed for this study highlights the use of various models of preaching. The sermons were designed to impact the cognitive and behavioral responses of the listeners in their practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer. A scale for prayer elements was used on the congregational respondents and the small group by pretest and posttest questionnaires. Responses to the posttest questionnaire indicate the changes, if any, in the congregational respondents and small group compared to the pre-study questionnaire.

Research Question #3

What other intervening variables might correlate with the observed changes in the congregational questionnaires and small group's responses to the preaching series?

Potential intervening variables in this study include age, gender, and number of years an individual has attended the Tryon United Methodist Church. These variables have been controlled for by their placement on the pre- and posttest questionnaire. Regression analysis was utilized to discover how much variance in the dependent variable (posttest score) is attributable to the intervening variable of interest (age, gender, number of years of attendance) while taking into account the variance that is explained by the pretest.

Population and Sample

The population for this study consists of all the adult worshippers (18 years and older) who attend the 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. Sunday morning worship services at the Tryon United Methodist Church at least twice each month. The weekly worship

attendance registration sheets were used to determine who fits the “twice per month” attendance criteria. For this study the sample is potentially every adult who fits the attendance criteria.

The average Sunday worship attendance for the year 2000 was 122 people, including children and adults. Approximately one hundred adults fit the attendance criteria to be included in this study.

Methodology

This project was an evaluative study in the experimental mode that utilized a pretest and posttest design with a small group. The worship attendees of the Tryon United Methodist Church who responded and those that volunteered for the small group served as the test group. The pre-study questionnaire was administered to the test group two weeks prior to the first sermon on the doctrine of covenant. The pre-study questionnaire served to provide a baseline reading of the respondents’ knowledge and feelings about the doctrine of covenant as well as their practice of prayer.

The congregational respondents, small group, and post-study questionnaire retained the doctrine of covenant questions in exactly the same form as presented in the pre-study questionnaire. In addition, the small group and post-study questionnaires ask the respondents to identify if the sermons have assisted them in coming to a more complete understanding of the doctrine of covenant and an improvement of their practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer.

Eleven volunteer adult lay persons who have been Christians for more than five years and were self-motivated to explore a deeper journey with God and the life of prayer provided me a small group. The group provided additional data through process notes and anecdotal material on the sermon series and devotional material for each

sermon provided each Sunday in the worship bulletin.

The format of the small group meeting was to gather on Wednesday evenings to discuss the sermons and explore spiritual issues in depth by utilizing the devotional material provided in the worship bulletin. I was the group leader and the sessions focused on the daily questions, Scripture reading, and insights from the devotional material. These sessions were audiotaped in order to provide freedom for the participants and ease of transcribing relevant comments to the sermon series on covenant and the spiritual discipline of prayer.

The process notes from each session provided an additional source of data to be evaluated with the formal questionnaires. The small group members were asked to re-create their codes utilized on the questionnaires by recording the first initial of their mother's maiden name and the last four digits of their social security code on a 3 x 5 index card at the last group meeting. The cards were placed in a hat and randomly drawn in order to utilize the pretest and posttest questionnaires and compare this data to the congregational responses in order to determine any changes in the understanding of the doctrine of covenant and the spiritual discipline of prayer.

Variables

The independent variable of this research project was the doctrine of covenant sermon series. Two levels of validity were sought for the independent variable. Each of the eight sermons were reviewed by Dr. Charles Killian, formerly the Charles and Margaret Cochran Professor of Preaching at Asbury Theological Seminary, who verified or challenged my presentation of the biblical material. This review provided a level of face validity. Content validity was verified in that the content of the sermons reflected all the generally accepted meanings of the concept of the doctrine of covenant from a

biblical perspective. The review of this work by the dissertation committee provided the level of expertise to verify or challenge the content validity.

For the purpose of this study, *the doctrine of covenant* is defined as “the revelation of God’s nature in the promise of extending grace to those who believe in the divine revelation of Jesus Christ.” The study measures two dependent variables in the worship attendee, namely cognition and behavior as a result of experiencing the storytelling sermons on the doctrine of covenant. The pre-study, small group and post-study questionnaire responses measured the change in cognition and behavior.

The church secretary of the Tryon United Methodist Church assisted in gathering the data. I provided the church secretary with the names of all the individuals who met the twice-a-month worship attendance criteria for inclusion in this study.

Instrumentation

A researcher-designed questionnaire that contains the Structure of Prayer Scale developed by Luckow, Ladd, Spilka, McIntosh, Parks, and Laforett (confession, petition, meditation-improvement, habit, ritual, and compassionate-petition) was the primary instrument used to measure the cognitive and behavioral responses of the congregation and small group with respect to their practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer. The questionnaire was administered prior to the sermon series and again at the end of the sermon series.

The small group process involved the study of devotional material for each sermon. Process notes and anecdotal material from the small group provided additional qualitative data for recording any changes in the spiritual discipline of prayer as a result of the sermon series on the doctrine of covenant.

Questionnaire Pretest

I piloted the questionnaire with the Administrative Council of the East Flat Rock United Methodist Church. East Flat Rock is twenty-five miles from Tryon United Methodist Church. These congregations are demographically and theologically similar. No errors or suggestions for revisions were noted. A second pilot was not needed.

Data Collection

The researcher-designed questionnaire with the structure of prayer scale was the primary source of data collection for the dependent variables of cognition and behavior. One hundred four congregational respondents and eleven volunteers for the small group served as the test group of this study.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Safeguarding the respondents' identities and providing confidentiality is an ethical consideration for a researcher administering a questionnaire. I assured the respondents of confidentiality and anonymity in the cover letter (see Appendix A) that accompanied the mailing of the pre- and post-study questionnaires. The letter stated that no attempt was made to match returned responses to individuals in the congregation. To provide this level of anonymity, each questionnaire instructed the respondents to create personal codes that they used when responding to all the questionnaires as well as the worship attendance card. The respondents' codes started with the first initial of their mothers' maiden names followed by the last four digits of the respondents' social security numbers. This method of coding allowed me to track changes in the individual respondents over time as well as note the composite changes for the entire small group. The advantage of giving direction for the creation of the personal code (the first initial of the mother's maiden name and the last four digits of the respondent's social security

number) assured consistency in recording the same code each time. Whereas a completely self-created code may be forgotten by the respondent over a period of three months, these codes were easily recalled and duplicated.

Questionnaire Administration

Two weeks prior to the first sermon, the pre-study questionnaire was administered to the congregation and small group of participants of the Tryon United Methodist Church who are 18 years old or older and attend worship at least twice a month. The requested small group was used to respond to the sermons in depth.

The post-study questionnaire was administered to the congregation and small group during the week following the eighth and final sermon in the series on covenant.

Data Analysis

The primary statistical procedures employed in analyzing the data gathered in the pre- and post-study questionnaires were t-tests and analysis of covariance. Descriptive statistics of the population tested were developed for age, years of attendance, and recorded worship attendance. Regression analyses were conducted to determine if age or years of attendance were significant explanatory of posttest scores.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Prayer is important in the daily lives of people who worship on a regular basis; however, a single, evaluative focus on the behavior of the practice of prayer may unintentionally cause worship participants to avoid the discipline. On the other hand, an approach to the spiritual discipline of prayer in a preaching series can facilitate the people's prayer.

A holistic approach to prayer recognizes that this spiritual discipline is shaped and sustained by each individual's faith in God and can develop through subsequent theological inquiry. The purpose of this research was to evaluate the cognitive and behavioral changes in the practice of prayer of the worship participants of the Tryon United Methodist Church as a result of an eight-sermon series on the doctrine of covenant, which was presented over a period of two months.

Three research questions guided this study.

What level of practice of the discipline of prayer characterized the congregational respondents and small group prior to the implementation of the sermon series?

What changes occurred in the discipline of prayer of the congregational respondents and small group after the sermon series?

What other intervening variables might correlate with the observed changes in the congregational questionnaires and small group's responses to the preaching series?

Profile of the Subjects

The pre- and post-sermon series questionnaires were mailed to all adults of the Tryon United Methodist Church. The total population for this study was 188. One hundred fifty-four subjects (82 percent) returned the pre-sermon series questionnaire,

while 119 subjects (63.5 percent) returned the post-sermon series questionnaire.

104 valid questionnaires were returned. Of these subjects, forty-three were male, and sixty-one were female. The ages of the respondents ranged from 18 years to 85 years; the average age was 63. The years of worship attendance ranged from less than one year to eighty years; twelve years in attendance was the mean (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics Table: Age

Age	Frequency	%	Cum. Freq.	Cum. %
18-44	10	9.35	10	9.35
45-54	19	17.76	29	27.10
55-64	24	22.43	53	49.53
65-74	28	26.17	81	75.70
75-84	20	18.69	101	94.39
85 +	6	5.61	107	100.00

The table shows that fifty-four respondents are 65 years of age or older for a total of 50.47 percent of the observed population. The greatest numbers of respondents are in the 65-74 years of age group. These descriptive statistics reveal that the majority of the population studied is classified in the time of life known as “senior” or “mature years.” The study was not focused on the particular spiritual needs of any age group but was inclusive of all age groups in terms of the practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer.

Seventy-eight respondents have attended the church for ten years or less, with fifty-three of them having attended the church for five years or less. The church records indicate that the newest members have transferred from other churches (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Descriptive Statistics Table: Years of Attendance

Years	Frequency	%	Cum. Freq.	Cum %
5 or <	53	49.53	53	49.53
6-10	25	23.36	78	72.90
11-20	11	10.28	89	83.13
21-30	2	1.87	91	85.05
31-40	5	4.67	96	89.72
> 40	11	10.28	107	100.00

Basis for the Study

I have been the pastor of the church for eight years. Prior to my appointment, the congregation undertook a self-study, including a six-month study of Scripture and spiritual needs by a representative group of church leaders. The group set goals for the congregation in the hope that living up to them would attract new members. This focus on the spiritual goals set by the church allowed me the freedom to help guide the church's ministry. A focus on the spiritual goals of the congregation was part of the motivation for this study.

As a result, the church has experienced a renewed focus on the preaching of the gospel in the last eight years. The numbers indicate some success in attracting new individuals to the church's ministry by focusing sermons on the spiritual basis of the Christian gospel.

Attendance Records

Worship attendance sheets were collected for each of the eight sermons presented in the preaching series. The official attendance numbers were compared to the recorded attendance sheets (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Worship Attendance

Sermon	Attendance	Recorded Attendance	Difference	% Recorded
09/01	125	92	(33)	74.0%
09/08	145	97	(48)	67.0%
09/15	139	85	(54)	61.5%
09/22	140	81	(59)	58.0%
09/29	136	81	(55)	60.0%
10/06	120	76	(44)	63.5%
10/13	112	70	(42)	63.0%
10/20	137	78	(59)	57.0%

The numbers indicate a strong presence at the preaching series, yet prove the indication of the erratic nature of inconsistent attendance. The practice of recording attendance by the congregation studied started strong but declined as the series progressed. The attendance during the series was greater than the average yearly attendance of 122 according to church records. The attendance records of this study indicate that the selection of a preaching series would influence the spiritual life of the greatest number of individuals in the ministry of Tryon United Methodist Church.

Reliability

The questionnaire used for this study was a researcher-designed instrument that utilized the “Structure of Prayer Scale” developed by Luckow, Ladd, Spilka, McIntosh, Parks, and Laforett (qtd. in Hill and Hood 70). The Structure of Prayer Scale measures prayer behavior. The scales are designed to assess several broad, conceptually distinct categories of prayer. The categories are easily understood from the universal meaning of each name. Confession means, “to confess one’s sins” (“Confession” 112). Petition means “a request” (“Petition” 396). Ritual means “a formal practice in religion” (“Ritual” 455). Meditation-improvement means “to reflect deeply upon spiritual matters” (“Meditation-improvement” 334). Habit means “tendency or practice in religion”

(“Habit” 243). Compassionate petition means “pity or sympathy for another”

(“Compassionate petition” 109). The study of prayer for a general population required the selection of this published instrument. In general, the scales have face validity with regard to the spiritual discipline of prayer. The instrument has twenty eight questions that assess six prayer types:

- Confession: 3, 4, 7, 14, and 17;
- Petition: 13, 15, and 22;
- Ritual: 1, 9, and 20;
- Meditation-improvement: 2, 16, 23, 26, and 27;
- Habit: 10, 12, 25, and 28; and,
- Compassionate petition: 5, 6, 8, 11, 18, 19, 21, and 24 (Hill and Hood 70).

Respondents rated each questionnaire item on a six-point Likert scale. Each scale item was tested for internal reliability with Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients showing the degree to which the items in an index are measuring the same thing.

Coefficients range from 0 (no correlation) to 1.0 (perfect correlation).

Table 4.4 shows the scale used to indicate a measure of the internal reliability of the items in the index.

Table 4.4. Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability Coefficients

<u>Scale</u>	<u>Pretest</u>	<u>Posttest</u>
Confession	.841304	.880121
Petition	.655477	.796348
Ritual	.810446	.834188
Meditate-Imp.	.822644	.817618
Habit	.707608	.731571

Compass.-Pet.	.814964	.854944
Overall	.915379	.929166

The numbers indicate consistency or stability of the items measured from one use (pre-) to the next (post-). Repeated measurements of the same thing that give identical or very similar results indicate that the research instrument (questionnaire) is reliable. The measure is reliable when it is free from random error. In each case the scales demonstrate adequate reliability.

Descriptive Data

The descriptive data or summary statistics provide a baseline reading of the subjects' knowledge and practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer with regard to the doctrine of covenant prior to the sermon series.

These statistics answer research question one: *What level of practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer characterized the congregational respondents and small group prior to the implementation of the sermon series?*

Prior to the preaching series, the respondents' scoring on the individual scales of the questionnaire indicate a generally positive approach to the spiritual discipline of prayer. The scores were registered on a scale of possible scores ranging from 6 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The fact those 154 individuals or 82 percent of the study population returned the pre-sermon series questionnaire signals a positive response to the topic of the study.

This study hypothesized a difference between the posttest scores and the pretest scores of each respondent. The null hypothesis then is no difference between the scores. I was trying to disprove the null hypothesis at the .05 level. Two-tailed statistical tests were

employed to disprove the null hypothesis at the .05 level of probability. They failed to do so.

The t-test of scale differences tests the null hypothesis that the observed differences between the posttest and the pretest will be 0. The probabilities shown are the two-tailed probabilities, indicating that the alternate hypothesis is simply that the difference is not 0, with no expectation of whether it will be positive or negative.

Statistical analysis reflected no significant differences between the pretest and posttest questionnaires. A slight increase was noted in two prayer scales, petition and confession, but the research findings on these two scales are not significant. A scale score was computed as the sum of the items over the number of items in the scale. The greatest number of respondents' questionnaires lost by using only complete scale scores was four forms.

Table 4.5 provides quantitative data to answer to research question two: *What changes occurred in the spiritual discipline of prayer of the congregational respondents and small group after the sermon series?*

Table 4.5. Changes in Prayer Behavior

Scale	Mean	Std.Dev	Std. Er.	t-value	p>t
Conf.	.06	.69	.06	.86	.39
Petition	.20	1.04	.10	1.94	.05
Ritual	.15	.98	.09	1.59	.11
Med./Im.	-.01	.51	.05	-.01	.84
Habit	.00	.50	.05	.15	.88
Com./Pet.	-.08	.43	.04	-1.94	.05

Analysis of covariance and regression analysis was conducted for the scales.

These tests measure how much of the variance of the dependent variable (posttest score)

is attributed to the intervening variable of interest (gender, age, number of years attending) while taking into account the variance that is explained by the pretest. The numbers did not indicate a significant impact for the study.

The statistical analysis section of this study did not sustain my hypothesis that the sermon series, or independent variable, would positively impact the spiritual discipline of prayer.

Changes in the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer

In addition to the formal questionnaire responses, I also received informal feedback through written responses on the post-sermon series questionnaires and the small group. This data answers research question three: *What other intervening variables might correlate with the observed changes in congregational questionnaires and small group's responses to the preaching series?*

On the posttest questionnaire, the invitation for responding read: "If there are thoughts, feelings, reflections you would like to convey as a participant in this study, please do so here." Thirty-eight respondents recorded written responses on the posttest questionnaire. Eleven respondents were male; twenty four were female. Three were unknown as to gender. These responses were grouped in seven categories: responses to specific numbers on the questionnaire (4), prayer (5), Bible (5), covenant (8), spiritual well-being (7), spiritual distress (2), and personal affirmation of the researcher (9).

The first category is responses to specific numbers on the questionnaire. These questions concern ritual, compassionate petition, and petition in the practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer.

Question #1 states, "When I pray alone, I have a ritual that I adhere to strictly." The respondent commented, "I pray too often to have a strict ritual." A comparison of the

posttest questionnaire to the pretest questionnaire for this item was a change from 6 (strongly agree on the pretest) to 4 (slightly agree on the posttest). This number indicates a growth from ritual prayer to less ritual prayer.

Question #13 states, “I must admit that I usually pray to get something.” The respondent commented, “I do not pray to get something for myself other than inner peace.” A comparison of the posttest questionnaire to the pretest questionnaire for this item was no change from 1 (strongly disagree on the pretest) to 1 (strongly disagree on the posttest).

Question #18 states, “Usually when I feel unable to help my loved ones, I ask God for help.” The respondent commented, “I ask God to help regardless, because as Christians we should do what is humanly possible. This one implies that we ask God for help only when we can do nothing.”

Question #22 states, “Most of my prayers are for God to solve problems.” The respondent commented, “I ask God to give me the wisdom to solve problems. If I can’t solve the problem then I ask Him for the strength to cope.” A comparison of the posttest questionnaire to the pretest questionnaire for this item was a change from 4 (slightly agree on the pretest) to 2 (moderately disagree on the posttest). The number indicates growth from prayer petitions for solving problems to greater spiritual well-being in prayer for coping by faith.

The second category is Prayer. Written comments from the respondents were taken from the posttest questionnaire.

Respondent one makes the following statement: “Prayer gives me a way to help when there is nothing I can do personally. The roles played by the pastor helped bring some parts of the Bible to life.”

Respondent two makes the following statements: “Power of prayer is so evident in my life and I am most thankful for that blessing. The lesson of the covenant through this series has been a real spiritual uplifting for me and a means to continue to dedicate my life better for Christ.”

Respondent three makes the following statements: “I just wanted to say prayer doesn’t necessarily make us feel like a better person, but makes me feel stronger. I pray mostly about the situation of this world, and desire His return more than ever, causing me to care and pray more for those that do not have the security of the Lord to ease the pain. We Christians need to pray that God will use us in our everyday lives to help others to desire to have what we have.”

Respondent four makes the following statements: “Prayer is an essential part of my daily life-talking to God about special needs, asking Him for guidance, help, strength, the Holy Spirit, giving Him praise, and thanksgiving, seeking to do His will. Prayer also requires listening and seeking God’s answer, something I am trying to do more and more every day. This brings you closer to God as you get to know what is on His heart and mind. Praise is also essential as is thanksgiving, and also repentance. However I don’t have set rituals as everyday and every situation is different. Certain words or phrases may be necessary when you simply cannot find the words to pray (e.g., “Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner” or “Lord, I give you praise and thanks or just ‘Jesus’”).”

Respondent five makes the following statement: “It has encouraged me to be more consistent in my prayer life. It has shown me where I need to improve.”

All of the respondents who commented on the posttest questionnaire indicated that they had been attending the church for five or six years. The number of years of attendance proves that the preaching focus of the church’s ministry has attracted new

individuals who are highly motivated in the spiritual discipline of prayer.

The third category is Bible. Written comments from the respondents were taken from the posttest questionnaire.

Respondent one states: “The series portrayed by Pastor Keith has been a wonderful way to teach Bible lessons more deeply than regular sermons and adds depth to what I glean from the Bible alone.”

Respondent two states: “Helps to appreciate how important the Old Testament is.”

Respondent three states: “I read the Bible more often. I speak more freely to others about Jesus. I have a better understanding about the Old Testament and I find myself doing more research.”

Respondent four states: “Your presentation of great people in the Bible helped my awareness of their importance.”

Respondent five states: “This was a wonderful series. It helped us to see these men as human beings with the same type feelings, thoughts, doubts, etc., as we have.”

The five respondents to this item on the posttest questionnaire indicated they had been attending the church in a range from one year to twenty years. Three of the five respondents have attended for nine years or less. The number of years of attendance proves that the preaching focus of the church’s ministry has attracted new individuals, and they are highly motivated in the spiritual discipline of reading Scripture.

The fourth category is Covenant. Written comments from the respondents were taken from the posttest questionnaire.

Respondent one states: “I certainly enjoyed seeing the reenactment of God’s covenants. It brought them so much more to life. Some of the characters you had to

portray were very, very difficult, however you did an incredible job. May God continue to work through you.”

Respondent two states: “Excellent series explaining these various covenants as a group. Reaffirmed that we are all ‘God’s covenant people’ through Jesus.”

Respondent three states: “God’s covenant is His promise that I can remember and be reassured by when I realize that there “is no good thing in me.” This focus on covenant has had the effect in my life of increasing my security daily that knowing that God’s promise doesn’t change even through my spiritual ups and downs “nothing but the blood of Jesus” has become my first thought when I wonder whether I’m fit for the Kingdom. Praise the Lord!”

Respondent four states: “I believe the study has done much to bring awareness to the congregation of the importance of God’s covenant and His people, and I pray will open hearts to the realization of how much God loves us and how much Jesus suffered on our behalf.”

Respondent five states: “Your dramatization brought the people of the Bible alive. The Doctrine of the Covenant is now easier to understand and how it applies to the Christian faith and prayer life.”

Respondent six states: “I do not know the expression ‘the doctrine of covenant’ and I have grown up in the church, both physically and spiritually. I know Jesus Christ as my savior and I feel very close to God and pray daily for His Holy Spirit to guide me in my witness to others.”

Respondent seven states: “I feel I have a better understanding of God’s covenant to us. This study has given me a more secure feeling during these turbulent times. Through the series I have been reaffirmed to the promise that God will always be with

me; guide me and hold me securely through His Son Jesus Christ. Thank you for answering God's call to be our pastor and His vessel on earth. Your light of Christ shines always."

Respondent eight states: "The sacred oath and promise of the Old Covenant is more deeply understood and loved by this series as the New Covenant of Christ comes in the word of the gospel. The liturgy of the office brings this to life."

The eight respondents to covenant in the written comment section of the posttest questionnaire indicate that they have been attending the church in a range from four years to forty-six years. Seven of the eight respondents indicate their attendance has been five years or less. The number of years of attendance proves that the preaching focus of the church's ministry has attracted new individuals who are highly motivated in the spiritual discipline of understanding Scripture.

The fifth category is Spiritual Well-Being. Written comments from the respondents were taken from the posttest questionnaire.

Respondent one states: "This study was beneficial and very uplifting."

Respondent two states: "I believe that having accepted Christ as my personal savior and Lord, has given me the assurance of eternal life. This assurance is my peace."

Respondent three states: "Vivid and alive—feeling closer."

Respondent four states: "The passion I felt during my first year as a Christian was rekindled."

Respondent five states: "The series helped me to see that no one is perfect. God knows and understands our weaknesses and faults and through faith we can be fulfilled as a person and spiritually."

Respondent six states: "God's love for me became more real."

Respondent seven states: “Each sermon touched me in a very special way. I felt even closer to God and stronger in my faith. What a wonderful gift you have given each of us. God Bless You.”

The seven respondents to this category on the written section of the posttest questionnaire indicate that they have been attending the church from two to seven years. The number of years of attendance proves that the preaching focus of the church’s ministry has attracted new individuals who are highly motivated to grow in the area of spiritual well-being.

The sixth category is Spiritual Distress. Written comments from the respondents were taken from the posttest questionnaire.

Respondent one states: “If you can withhold this data from your study without jeopardizing its reliability you might wish to do so. My prayer experience has been erratic during these weeks. There is more work to be done.”

Respondent two states: “I purposely did not keep a copy of my first questionnaire. My responses today are therefore free of any attempt to fix my answers. Even so, I think it worth noting that my responses both times have been influenced by feelings of spiritual distance from the Lord. I have continued to pray through this time, but it just feels like a dry season. God is still faithful; He still blesses me and answers prayers. I just feel disconnected some how. I note this because it bears no relation to the sermon series or research. It just seems to be the way it is for me of late. Nevertheless, I find Pastor Keith’s delivery of his messages inspiring, coherent, and powerful. I’m glad I was able to participate in all but one.”

The two respondents to this category on the written responses of the posttest questionnaire indicate that they have been attending the church for five years. The

number of years of attendance proves that the preaching focus of the church's ministry has attracted new individuals who are highly motivated in the area of spirituality.

The seventh category is Personal Affirmation of the Researcher. Written comments from the respondents were taken from the posttest questionnaire.

Respondent one states: "You did a wonderful job. I felt like I was right there as you told each story. It was the best presentation I have ever seen. God Bless You."

Respondent two states: "I have been going to church for 45 years and you are the first minister that I have had that is genuine and sincere. Thank you."

Respondent three states: "I think you did a wonderful job in presenting the sermons to us. So real. You felt as though you were right there. Thank you for your time and effort you put in bringing them to us."

Respondent four states: "In the middle of the first sermon of the special series I realized Pastor Keith not only had my attention he had captured the hearts of my children. Each week we had discussed and looked forward to His sermon. Pew wiggling and whispering has been at an all time low. We have learned much from His presentations. I am impressed by the presentation of this sermon series which shows Keith's dedication and confidence in truth. We look forward to more sermons like he has given us in this series. We as a family could not be happier or more secure with our Pastor and church home. Thanks. Many thanks."

Respondent five states: "The word of God was made alive by your wonderful presentations, Pastor Keith. Thank you so much and God bless you for blessing us."

Respondent six states: "We think you did a wonderful sermon series and the anointing of the Holy Spirit was with you during this whole time. You are a Pastor blessed with many gifts of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

Respondent seven states: “Appreciate your hard work presenting this program. It has been very interesting and enlightening. Thank you.”

Respondent eight states: “I appreciate being part of the sermon series you shared. I will always remember you and your special gifts. Thank you.”

Respondent nine states: “I feel that God is the see all and the know all of all life and love. I believe that He has picked the perfect messenger in Pastor Franklin. I honestly believe that Pastor Franklin is a godly person.”

The nine respondents to this category in the written responses of the post-sermon series questionnaire indicate that they have attended the church from less than one year to thirty years. Seven of the nine respondents have attended the church for five years or less. The number of years of attendance proves that the preaching focus of the church’s ministry has attracted new individuals who are highly motivated in the area of spirituality.

Small Group

Small group meetings were held on five Wednesday evenings: 11, 18, and 25 September 2002; and 9 and 30 October 2002. The creation of a small group was achieved by volunteer adult laypersons, which have been Christians for more than five years or more and who were self-motivated to explore a deeper journey with God and the life of prayer. Eleven members participated in the group discussions that centered on the devotional material for each of the sermons in the preaching series. The members included a retired military officer, retired camping professional, retired banker, retired grocery store manager, retired security officer, housewife, single individual, retired nurse, retired administrative assistant, a teacher, and a car salesman.

I convened each small group meeting was convened after the presentation of the

sermons in the series and met for 1 ½ hours. The data gathered was from process notes and anecdotal material on the sermon series and the devotional material for each sermon provided each Sunday in the worship bulletin. The members agreed to their comments being recorded on audio tape, and the general discussion of the sessions were transcribed.

The comments on the character of Noah were: “Seeing a rainbow at the end of a storm while driving gives me comfort. I don’t think I am where Noah was with God. We are talking about an unusually large boat. I don’t think we are prepared or our children are prepared. If they do not know the stories when they are small how will they know when they are grown? Some do not use the rainbow today because others have used it for their symbol.

The comments on the character of Abraham were: “This is a very difficult thing for me. I cannot imagine someone killing their child. I was looking at the cross and thinking this is what God did for us. I think of it as the God of love agape the kind of love I do not have. Unconditional. Even when people do you wrong, you love them. The bottom line is the character of the father God.”

The comments on the character of Moses were: “Years ago I made my covenant with God. I was impressed and made my own covenant with God. ‘To the best of my ability I will live my life in complete surrender to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To be faithful in service, prayer, and study, to be in complete communion with God. To be sensitive to God’s call and guidance. To go and speak boldly about Jesus and share his message. To keep my body in good health, my mind and words clean so that my whole being may become a reflection of Christ living in me. With God as my helper I make this covenant.’ You have to ‘go back down’ but you still remember your experience with God. I have been more aware of praise. I have not been able to concentrate. I remember

more of the things for others in our prayer time on Sunday. When people come into the sanctuary, they know that they can go to the altar and pray. You just get blessed by keeping on keeping on.”

The comments on the characters of David and Jeremiah were: “I never think of the covenants as separate. There is a time when you have to speak the ‘strong word’ like when you fire someone. You know you are right, but that is difficult. The devotional material sheets flow together. There is always the possibility of others rejecting you. Under the New Covenant, all of God’s people would receive forgiveness. Whenever I cannot pray, I take the Psalms, and it helps me. I use the hymnal as well as the Bible. Prayer is communication. The promises of God. My Sabbath time is Saturday a day off.”

The comments on the subject of Baptism were: “I went through confirmation class, and we were all baptized at age twelve. I was immersed in the Baptist church. We had to go to class for six weeks. I was terrified of water because I almost drowned at age five. We had to be put all the way under the water. I still have the feeling of going into that warm water. I was baptized in the Jordan River. Baptism gives you a point to go back to that never changes.”

The comments on the subject of the Lord’s Supper were: “Some people leave when they see we are going to have communion. If we are saved by the blood of Jesus, we should want to come to communion. Are you familiar with Bishop Welch? He started the tradition of juice in our services. There are some denominations that only use alcohol. My son is in a church that doesn’t share communion even on World Communion Sunday. Once on a mission trip to Honduras, we used a rusty old trunk for an altar. A dry loaf of bread and some juice. We were in a Quonset hut. But it became a very special communion for me. I have been where people serve one another in line. There are all

kinds of ways to celebrate the Lord's Supper."

The comments on the Cross and Resurrection were: "I like the cross on Tryon Peak. You can see it from Interstate 26. We saw a large cross in Texas from ten miles away. We call it Good Friday, but it really wasn't. Today there are blood-borne pathogens. Years ago we didn't worry about these things. Seeing an accident with blood took a long time for me to get out of my mind. Jesus shed His blood for us. When I finally realized that the same power of Easter and the Resurrection was the same power that was living in me, what a day that was!"

The comments on the subject of Pentecost were: "That is when the Holy Spirit came and the power to change the world was given to the church. The Holy Spirit will lead us to be witnesses in the world."

The members of the small group were asked to record their created code on 3 x 5 index cards and place them in a hat in order for me to draw randomly pre- and posttest questionnaires. Six Pre-Sermon Series Questionnaires and six Post-Sermon Series Questionnaires were located with corresponding codes. Five matches were found in the Pre- and Post-Sermon Series Questionnaires. They are as follows: P-6738 (with nine changes Pre- and Post), M-8145 (with sixteen changes Pre- and Post), M-2017 (with two changes Pre- and Post), H-3297 (with six changes Pre- and Post), and B-9280 (with eight changes Pre and Post) (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6 Small Group Changes Pre- and Post-Sermon Series Questionnaire

#	B-9280 Pre-Post	H-3297 Pre-Post	M-2017 Pre-Post	M-8145 Pre-Post	P-6738 Pre-Post	Ch. Pre-Post
1	4-5	4-4	4-4	3-6	1-1	2
2	6-6	6-6	5-6	4-5	6-6	2
3	6-6	1-6	6-6	6-6	1-3	2
4	6-6	6-6	6-6	6-6	6-6	0

5	6-6	6-6	6-6	2-5	6-5	2
6	6-6	6-6	6-6	6-5	6-6	1
7	6-6	5-6	6-6	6-6	6-6	1
8	6-6	6-6	6-6	6-6	6-4	1
9	3-3	1-4	3-5	4-6	1-1	3
10	5-5	6-6	6-6	2-3	6-6	1
11	6-6	6-6	6-6	2-3	6-6	1
12	4-5	6-6	4-4	6-6	6-6	1
13	3-1	1-1	1-1	5-3	1-1	2
14	4-6	4-4	6-6	6-6	6-6	1
15	4-1	1-4	1-1	1-4	6-3	4
16	6-6	6-6	6-6	6-5	6-6	1
17	6-6	1-4	6-6	6-4	6-6	2
18	6-6	6-6	6-6	5-6	4-6	2
19	6-6	6-6	6-6	5-5	6-6	0
20	5-5	1-1	2-2	4-2	4-4	1
21	6-5	6-4	6-6	6-5	6-6	3
22	3-5	4-4	2-2	3-3	1-3	2
23	6-6	6-6	5-5	5-4	5-6	2
24	4-6	6-6	6-6	6-6	6-6	1
25	6-6	6-6	6-6	4-5	6-6	1
26	6-6	6-6	6-6	5-5	6-4	1
27	6-6	6-6	6-6	5-5	6-4	1
28	6-6	6-6	6-6	6-6	6-6	0
#Ch.	8	6	2	16	9	41

The results of this survey indicate that four out of the five members of the small group did indicate change from the Pre- to Post-Sermon Series Questionnaire responses. Respondents B-9280 and P-6738 have attended the church for forty-two years and thirty-five years respectively. The numbers of change indicate the second and third highest number of changes from pretest to posttest. Respondents H-3297, M-2017, and M-8145 have attended the church for five, five, and eight years respectively. The numbers of change indicate the second and least number of changes from the pretest to posttest, while the last respondent recorded the fifth or highest number of changes from the pretest to the posttest.

The number of years of attendance proves that the preaching focus of the church's

ministry has attracted new individuals who are highly motivated in the area of spirituality.

I conclude that the changes are attributed to a greater focus in the devotional material as an individual is involved in a small group process whether the respondent has attended the church for many years or for five or fewer years.

Summary of Significant Findings

1. No significant statistical changes observed in the spiritual discipline of prayer between the Pre- and Post-Sermon Series Questionnaire responses.
2. Subjects registered more positive change in general spiritual well-being than in the practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer.
3. The doctrine of covenant preached in the first-person genre was significant in communicating the humanity of biblical characters.
4. The doctrine of covenant preached in the first person genre was significant in communicating the interrelatedness of the Old and New Testaments.
5. The small group data did indicate a small change when compared to the written responses by the general congregational respondents.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The origin of this research project can be traced directly to my desire to become a more effective pastor in the role of spiritual guide. The congregation of Tryon United Methodist Church allowed me to present a sermon series on the doctrine of covenant in order to measure whether or not their practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer would be impacted. The respondents to the pre- and post-sermon series questionnaires provided a significant sample to test the hypothesis that the doctrine of covenant would positively impact the practice of the spiritual discipline of prayer. The hypothesis was not proven by the statistical analysis of respondents' pre- and post-sermon series questionnaires.

This project was developed as a preaching series for use during worship in order to influence as many individuals as possible who attend Tryon United Methodist Church. The goal of the church is not merely to measure attendance but to equip people to live out the Christian faith. The Good News of the gospel is that Jesus Christ has faithfully provided the covenant relationship established by God.

The written responses recorded on the post-sermon series questionnaire and the process notes from the small group indicate that the sermon series had a positive impact upon the general spiritual well-being of some who participated in the study. I have concluded that the sermon series appears helpful in teaching the biblical doctrine of covenant.

The sermons attempted to connect the subjects of doctrine and prayer by utilizing biblical characters to model how to live trustfully in God's presence. The idea of "being" in prayer instead of "doing" the elements of prayer in order to promote a sense of security for a relationship with God was a motivating factor for this study. The flow of "dance"

was inspiration of how to interpret the characters in demonstrating the spiritual discipline of prayer.

Major Findings

The results of this study demonstrate that the sermon series on the doctrine of covenant did not significantly impact the spiritual discipline of prayer in the respondents. General areas of spiritual well-being that were influenced included

A better understanding of the Scriptures, with five respondents making positive written comments on the post-sermon series questionnaire,

A clearer understanding of the doctrine of covenant, with eight respondents making positive written comments on the post-sermon series questionnaire, and

An increase in spiritual well-being, with seven respondents making positive written comments on the post-sermon series questionnaire.

Five out of eleven members of the small group registered changes from the pre- to post-sermon series questionnaire. These changes are attributed to a focus on the devotional material the individuals used in the small group process.

The preaching of first person characters in storytelling genre was positively received and an effective way to communicate the doctrine of covenant as God's promise to extend grace to those who believe in the divine revelation of Jesus Christ.

The sermon series was designed to highlight the interaction of biblical characters with God through reaching for and being reached for, receiving and giving, hearing and speaking, and sharing silence in prayer. Positive comments from five respondents to the post-sermon series questionnaire prove the value of this genre of preaching.

Implications of Findings and Practical Applications

The positive results of this research indicate that the doctrine of covenant was

better understood by the sermon series. This study demonstrates that pastors need not shy away or dread preaching on biblical doctrines. Preaching on doctrine is important to the spiritual life of each congregation. Preaching that focuses on prayer can be accomplished in a positive manner and help a congregation in living the life of Christian faith.

The sermons on the biblical doctrine of covenant were enhanced by using the genre of first person biblical characters. In my experience, the movement away from using notes and pulpit dramatically increased the rapport between preacher and congregation during the delivery of the sermon. The positive reception of congregation served as a reminder that not only does the sermon content need to be presented in an engaging manner, but it must be supported by a helpful style of delivery. This genre may be employed for preaching in general. I had requests from the congregation to develop other preaching series using the storytelling method.

The focus of this project reminds the church that people are interested in the forms of spiritual discipline. If helping Christians mature in their life of faith is the goal of pastors, this study is an encouragement to those who have been reluctant to preach on doctrine. I was astonished to discover in the congregation a significant lack of knowledge about the topic of doctrine.

The Scriptures indicate that the covenant community is the place where God's people grow in grace. The sermons on biblical characters that reveal the limits of the human condition and the unlimited nature of grace through the covenants of God to enable individuals and congregations to grow in wholeness and in the image of Jesus Christ.

Theological Reflections

Four theological reflections provide a brief summary of what the literature

research and evaluations of the data from the respondents have taught. These four reflections are the theological implications evident by this study.

First, *God is the covenant maker*. God made humankind as male and female in his image and likeness; therefore, humanity has been created by God to be in covenant relationship. Each of God's covenants has been offered to humanity with love. God has always kept covenant with humanity.

The literature review of this study documented twenty-nine direct Scripture references to covenant. A primary focus of the study was to provide an understanding for the congregation on how all the covenants of God were interrelated and how each contributes to the fulfillment of the new covenant in Jesus Christ. The comparison of the old covenant community in Israel and the new covenant community in the Christian church was explored as the model to fulfill God's purpose by the establishment of community.

God promised four things by the establishment of the New Covenant: (1) that he would write his law upon our hearts and minds, (2) that he will be God and are his people, (3) that the Holy Spirit will reveal all things, and (4) that God will forgive sin.

Eight respondents to the written comments section of the posttest questionnaire indicated that they had grown in their knowledge of the biblical doctrine of covenant and the implication of how covenant impacts the Christian life. The number of respondents indicate a significant result of the preaching series to impact spiritual formation for some in the congregation studied.

Second, *humanity breaks covenant*. Humanity could not keep covenant with God because of the condition of sin. The fact that humanity failed in each covenant offered by God in the Old Testament reveals the weakness of flesh.

The record of Israel in the Scriptures documents the failure of people to keep covenant with God. The essential problem is the failure to give complete self-surrender to God. The New Testament records that humanity is still unable to keep the demands of the old covenant offered by God. One fulfilled the demands of holiness while identifying with the weakness of human beings. He was the only one who could keep a covenant relationship with God his Son, Jesus Christ.

The Structure of Prayer Scale used in this study has a scale for the subject of confession in the spiritual discipline of prayer. The scale differences indicate a slight increase in this scale from pre- to posttest (see Table 4.4 p. 43). While this was not a significant number for the study, it does indicate the vital role for confession in the prayer lives of the congregation studied.

Third, *God offered the greatest covenant in Jesus Christ*. The birth, life, ministry, sacrifice, death, resurrection, ascension, and soon return of Jesus are the hope of humanity to live in covenant relationship with God.

The gift of Christ in baptism reveals that he identified with fallen nature, while remaining the sinless one. Jesus' ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing reveal the power of God and the inauguration of the kingdom of God among humanity. The reinstitution of the Passover was the symbol of the inauguration of the coming kingdom. The covenant of grace was bestowed on the people of God through the mediation of Christ on the cross of Calvary. The power of resurrection proves that God is able to keep covenant and extend the benefits of covenant to his people that accept the sacrifice of Christ. The Holy Spirit is the power granted to the new covenant community to extend the offer of grace to the world.

Five respondents to the written comments section of the posttest questionnaire

indicated that they had grown in the area of spiritual well-being. The number of respondents indicate a significant result of the preaching series to impact the spiritual life for some in the congregation studied.

Lastly, prayer is essential to living in covenant relationship with God.

Communication with God gives assurance to humanity that this vital relationship is available to individuals and to the community of faith.

Prayer is the way that humanity communicates to the covenant partner God. A person enters into the dynamics of a vital relationship by spending time with God. Great saints in the Scripture and in Church history testify to the intimacy that is possible with God through prayer. Since prayer is a matter of the “heart,” logically the desire to pray comes as one sees God as the “beloved.” The act of praying always involves speaking and listening, for both covenant partners, humanity and God.

God has given covenant as a way to understand the mystery of grace. He chooses freely to communicate his heart and will in a variety of ways. By the example of Jesus as a person of prayer, humanity receives the example of how to live in a dynamic covenant with the Father.

Five respondents to the written comments section of the posttest questionnaire indicated that they had grown in the spiritual discipline of prayer. The number of respondents indicate a significant result of the preaching series to impact the prayer life of some in the congregation studied. Five individuals growing in their prayer life suggest that the study was valid in my hypothesis that preaching on the doctrine of covenant may impact the spiritual discipline of prayer.

An unexpected discovery during the analysis of the study was that the project yielded an opportunity for the subjects to participate in four out of five of John Wesley’s

“Instituted Means of Grace”: prayer, reading the Scriptures, meditation, participation in the Lord’s Supper, and Christian conference. The fifth “Instituted Means of Grace” is fasting (Wesley, Works 8, 322). Therefore, in future studies a consideration of the impact of covenant upon the instituted means of grace as a teaching experience is a possibility.

Limitations of the Study

The study could have been strengthened by a general evaluation of more of the spiritual disciplines such as spiritual reading, worship, fasting, study, and retreat. In particular another scale measures changes in spiritual well-being. A longer posttest period would give the opportunity to track changes in the spiritual discipline of prayer of the subjects. A final observation of six months to a year following the completion of the last sermon would help to determine the enduring results of the sermon series. I could invite written responses of the general congregation and compare those to the small group via the created code.

Contribution to Research Methodology

The greatest contribution this study makes to research methodology is in homiletics. The results of this study indicate that doctrine is effectively communicated in the genre of first person biblical characters. If this study had been extended to six months, the addition of a mid-test observation could have strengthened the findings over time.

Further Studies

Prayer is a part of the broader context of one’s relationship with God. This study has focused on one of the classical spiritual disciplines being impacted through a preaching series on the doctrine of covenant. A follow up study to this research could explore whether or not a need exists for understanding the relationship between all the spiritual disciplines and the doctrine of covenant.

APPENDIX A

Pre-Sermon Series Questionnaire and Mailings

Rev. J. Keith Franklin
PO Box 897
Tryon, NC 28782

August 9, 2002

Dear Friend,

You may be aware that I have been working on a dissertation project for a Doctor of Ministry degree from Asbury Theological Seminary. The first three chapters of the dissertation have been completed and approved by my faculty committee. Most of the library research for this project is now complete. The time has come to collect data from a real, live congregation. I am writing to ask for your assistance.

Here is how you can help:

1. Complete the enclosed questionnaire. It will take no more than 15 minutes to complete. Note that there is a flip side to the sheet.
2. Place your completed questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope.
3. Place the envelope in the mail by **Monday, August 26th**.

Here is my pledge to you:

1. No attempt will be made to match returned questionnaires to individuals within the congregation.
2. Because all responses are vital to this research, every returned questionnaire will be gratefully received and included in the study results.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Rev. J. Keith Franklin

Phone: (828) 859-9218 or 859-9374

tumc@teleplex.net

PRE-SERMON SERIES QUESTIONNAIRE

Preaching the Doctrine of Covenant and Its Impact upon the Spiritual

Discipline of Prayer

In order to assure complete anonymity, please fill in the following boxes to create your own personal code:

The first initial of your mother's maiden name: ____

The last four digits of your social security number: ____ ____ ____ ____

I. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

II. Your Age: ____

III. The number of years you have been attending Tryon United Methodist Church (if you have begun attending worship at the church within the last year, please respond with "under 1 year"): ____

IV. Prayer or meditation is approached in a wide variety of fashions. For the purposes of this study, please think of "pray" and "meditate" as the same sort of practice. We would like you to indicate for each of the following statements the position that most accurately reflects your personal practices. Please use this code for your answer:

1 = strongly disagree	4 = slightly agree
2 = moderately disagree	5 = moderately agree
3 = slightly disagree	6 = strongly agree

- ____ 1. When I pray alone, I have a ritual that I adhere to strictly.
- ____ 2. Through deep prayer I am able to know God better.
- ____ 3. It is important to me to tell God about my sins or faults.
- ____ 4. When I pray, I want to share my life with God.
- ____ 5. I usually pray for God to make me a better person.
- ____ 6. I pray to give thanks for all God has done for me.
- ____ 7. When I feel guilty about something, it helps to tell God about it.
- ____ 8. When God has answered my prayers, I usually give thanks.
- ____ 9. My prayers are like rituals; they have a regular, orderly sequence.
- ____ 10. I usually say a prayer before each meal.
- ____ 11. I like to say prayers for people about whom I care very much.
- ____ 12. I always pray before I go to sleep.
- ____ 13. I must admit that I usually pray to get something.
- ____ 14. Confession is important to me because it helps me lead a more respectable life.
- ____ 15. When I pray, I ask God for special favors.
- ____ 16. Prayer helps me keep my life balanced and happy.
- ____ 17. When I pray, I confess to God the things I should not have done.
- ____ 18. Usually when I feel unable to help my loved ones, I ask God for help.
- ____ 19. I ask God to help others when I am unable to.
- ____ 20. When I pray, I have certain words or phrases that I repeat a number of times.

- Please turn over to complete -

Please use this code for your answer:

- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 = strongly disagree | 4 = slightly agree |
| 2 = moderately disagree | 5 = moderately agree |
| 3 = slightly disagree | 6 = strongly agree |

- ___ 21. In my prayers I like to express my recognition for what God grants me.
- ___ 22. Most of my prayers are for God to solve problems.
- ___ 23. When I finish praying, I feel like a better person.
- ___ 24. I pray for other people.
- ___ 25. A morning prayer helps me cope with the world during the day.
- ___ 26. Prayer is a way for me to connect with my inner spirit.
- ___ 27. When I pray, I feel secure.
- ___ 28. I pray daily.

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Please use the same code from the top of this page to answer the following questions:

- V. ___ I believe the Doctrine of Covenant is important to the Christian faith.
- VI. ___ I believe the Doctrine of Covenant is important in my prayer life.

Thank you for taking the time to respond. Please mail in the self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Thank you

For completing and returning the questionnaire you
received from me last week.

If you have not yet mailed yours back, it's not too late.
Would you take a few minutes and respond today?
Your participation will make this a stronger study.

Pastor Keith

APPENDIX B

Post-Sermon Series Questionnaire and Mailings

Rev. J. Keith Franklin
PO Box 897
Tryon, NC 28782

October 21, 2002

Dear Friend,

Thank you for your participation in my dissertation project. This is the final survey that you will be asked to complete now that all eight sermons in the series have been preached.

Throughout this entire process, I have been grateful for the encouragement and support I have received from the congregation. As I now come to the end of the sermon series, once again I request your assistance. Here is how you can help:

1. Complete the enclosed questionnaire. It will take no more than 15 minutes. Note that there is a flip side to the sheet.
2. Place your completed questionnaire in the enclosed, self-addressed, stamped envelope.
3. Place the envelope in the mail by **Monday, November 4, 2002.**

I continue to offer this pledge to you:

1. No attempt will be made to match returned questionnaires to individuals within the congregation.
2. Because all responses are vital to this research, every returned questionnaire will be gratefully received and included in the study results.

I look forward to presenting the results of this research to all interested persons on Sunday, January 12, 2003 at 12 noon in the sanctuary of the Tryon United Methodist Church.

Sincerely,

Rev. J. Keith Franklin

Phone: (828) 859-9218 or 859-9374

tumc@teleplex.net

POST-SERMON SERIES QUESTIONNAIRE

Preaching the Doctrine of Covenant and Its Impact upon the Spiritual

Discipline of Prayer

In order to assure complete anonymity, please fill in the following boxes to create your own personal code:

The first initial of your mother's maiden name: ____

The last four digits of your social security number: ____ ____ ____ ____

I. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female

II. Your Age: ____

III. The number of years you have been attending Tryon United Methodist Church (if you have begun attending worship at the church within the last year, please respond with "under 1 year"): ____

IV. Prayer or meditation is approached in a wide variety of fashions. For the purposes of this study, please think of "pray" and "meditate" as the same sort of practice. We would like you to indicate for each of the following statements the position that most accurately reflects your personal practices. Please use this code for your answer:

1 = strongly disagree

4 = slightly agree

2 = moderately disagree

5 = moderately agree

3 = slightly disagree

6 = strongly agree

- ____ 1. When I pray alone, I have a ritual that I adhere to strictly.
- ____ 2. Through deep prayer I am able to know God better.
- ____ 3. It is important to me to tell God about my sins or faults.
- ____ 4. When I pray, I want to share my life with God.
- ____ 5. I usually pray for God to make me a better person.
- ____ 6. I pray to give thanks for all God has done for me.
- ____ 7. When I feel guilty about something, it helps to tell God about it.
- ____ 8. When God has answered my prayers, I usually give thanks.
- ____ 9. My prayers are like rituals; they have a regular, orderly sequence.
- ____ 10. I usually say a prayer before each meal.
- ____ 11. I like to say prayers for people about whom I care very much.
- ____ 12. I always pray before I go to sleep.
- ____ 13. I must admit that I usually pray to get something.
- ____ 14. Confession is important to me because it helps me lead a more respectable life.
- ____ 15. When I pray, I ask God for special favors.
- ____ 16. Prayer helps me keep my life balanced and happy.
- ____ 17. When I pray, I confess to God the things I should not have done.
- ____ 18. Usually when I feel unable to help my loved ones, I ask God for help.
- ____ 19. I ask God to help others when I am unable to.
- ____ 20. When I pray, I have certain words or phrases that I repeat a number of times.

- Please turn over to complete -

Please use this code for your answer:

- 1 = strongly disagree 4 = slightly agree
2 = moderately disagree 5 = moderately agree
3 = slightly disagree 6 = strongly agree

- ____ 21. In my prayers I like to express my recognition for what God grants me.
 ____ 22. Most of my prayers are for God to solve problems.
 ____ 23. When I finish praying, I feel like a better person.
 ____ 24. I pray for other people.
 ____ 25. A morning prayer helps me cope with the world during the day.
 ____ 26. Prayer is a way for me to connect with my inner spirit.
 ____ 27. When I pray, I feel secure.
 ____ 28. I pray daily.

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Please use the same code from the top of this page to answer the following questions:

- V. ____ I believe the Doctrine of Covenant is important to the Christian faith.
VI. ____ I believe the Doctrine of Covenant is important in my prayer life.

If there are thoughts, feelings, reflections you would like to convey as a participant in this study, please do so here:

[illegible]

Thank you for taking the time to respond. Please mail in the self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Thank you

For completing and returning the final questionnaire for my dissertation project. Your participation has been invaluable, and I am very appreciative.

If you have not yet mailed yours back, it's not too late. Please take a few minutes and respond today. I am now working with a tight schedule in order to finish up the work and graduate in May. If I could have your response as soon as possible, that will help me stay on target.

Pastor Keith

APPENDIX C

Sermon Attendance Sheets

SERMON #1

“Noah and the Bow in the Clouds”

Genesis 6, 7, 8, 9 (selections)

The first initial of your mother’s maiden name:

The last four digits of your social security number:

9/1/02

SERMON #2

“Keeping Hope When God’s Promise Is Delayed”

Genesis 12, 15, 17, 21, 22 (selections)

The first initial of your mother’s maiden name:

The last four digits of your social security number:

9/8/02

SERMON #3

“Boundary Words and Freedom”
Exodus 2, 3, 12, 24 (selections)

The first initial of your mother’s maiden name:

The last four digits of your social security number:

9/15/02

SERMON #4

“The King and the Promise of a New Covenant”
1 Samuel 16; 2 Samuel 5, 7, 15, 18, 19 (selections)

The first initial of your mother’s maiden name:

The last four digits of your social security number:

9/22/02

SERMON #5

“Come Clean and Join the Family”

Mark 1:1-11

The first initial of your mother’s maiden name:

The last four digits of your social security number:

9/29/02

SERMON #6

“Soul Food”

Mark 14:12-25

The first initial of your mother’s maiden name:

The last four digits of your social security number:

10/6/02

SERMON #7

“New Life by Death”
Matthew & John (selections)

The first initial of your mother’s maiden name:

The last four digits of your social security number:

10/13/02

SERMON #8

“The Power to Live”
Acts 2:1-20

The first initial of your mother’s maiden name:

The last four digits of your social security number:

10/20/02

APPENDIX D

Sermons on the Doctrine of Covenant and Devotional Material

First Sermon: “Preaching the Doctrine of Covenant and Its Impact upon the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer”

Scripture: Genesis 6:5-8, 13-14, 17-18: 7:1-12, 17; 8:6-11, 15-17; 9:8-13

Sermon: “Noah and the Bow in the Clouds”

Date: Sunday, 1 September 2002

Preacher: John Keith Franklin, Pastor: Tryon United Methodist Church

My name is Noah, son of Lamesch. I am the ninth descendent of Adam through Seth. My father said my name means “to comfort, to cheer, to rest.” He named me Noah because “out of the ground which Yahweh cursed this one [I] will bring relief from work and the toil of our hands” (Gen.5:29).

I am trying to live up to this name my father gave me. My life has been blessed with a good wife and three fine sons: Shem, Ham, and Japeth. My family is very important to me. They have always believed in me and trusted in what I tell them. If you like I will share my story with you, and you will see how important it was that they believed and trusted in me for God spoke to me.

Yes, it’s true. God communicated to me. When God told me to build an ark, I could only think, “Why would God ask me to build a ship here in the desert?” He explained that there was wickedness in the world and that he was going to blot out man and beast. He said that I had found favor in his eyes. I always knew that we were somehow not interested in the same things as our neighbors. Then God said he was going to flood the earth, and all life would die.

For quite a while, I thought about why God would do such a thing. Was this justice or love? Didn’t the people need a chance to repent? What had the animals done to deserve this fate? I could not voice my questions to God. This is God’s decision. My job was to obey.

My next worry was how the family would react. Would they think I had been out in the desert sun too long? Then I had to consider the amount of work that was to be done: How could I build such a ship? Where would I get all the animals? But I am only a man, a creature, not the creator. This is God's wisdom. A sheep doesn't question the shepherd just follows.

So I gathered the family at our evening meal to make known to them what God had said to me. While there were a few raised eyebrows and astonished looks, no one questioned my hearing from God. My wife and sons and the spouses once again trusted that God wanted us to do this thing even if it meant no one else would understand.

I went on to explain how God had revealed the dimensions of the Ark. There were to be three decks made of gopher wood it is strong—and we were to cover it with pitch. The skeleton of the ship was as large as your room (sanctuary). We made enough room on each floor for the animals, the food, and on the top a place for the eight of us in which to dwell.

Then the thing I feared the most, the neighbors and townspeople, began to speak aloud of why a crazy man would build such a massive ship so far from the sea. They mocked us: "What are you doing you foolish old man? Are you going to set sail in the desert?" Then there was the ridicule as my wife or Shem, Ham, or Japeth went into town for supplies. In all my six hundred years I never thought it mattered to anyone what I did. Now I am following God's plan, and suddenly my family is paying the price. Were they right? I wondered until the ark was completed; then God spoke to me again!

We began to load the ark with every kind of creature male and female. And that first day was when the water began to fall from the sky. No one had ever seen rain before. The neighbors first looked in surprise toward the sky but then resumed their insults

toward me. They called the ark, “Noah’s Zoo.”

The second day the rains increased, and I soon began to feel pity for my tormentors. Their insults and jeers began to fade as the last of the animals entered the ark and the rivers began to overflow.

We entered the ark, and God shut the door. At first our eyes had to grow accustomed to the dim light. But by now it was gray and wet outdoors. There were such smells we had to endure! While all the animals were below us, the four rooms at the top seemed to grow smaller by the hour.

Then there was the sound of heavier rain and what must have been the floodwaters of the river breaking across the land. Then an enormous rush of water from below us. It seemed that the earth itself opened up and lifted the ark off its base.

We were eating our first meal and hearing the sounds of the poor souls outside scrambling for higher ground. All of us knew people out there that were not going to live. Our sons seemed particularly troubled. The wives simply hid their faces and cried.

In a few days there were no sounds of people any more. We had been floating along the rising torrent of water. There were a few moments when it seemed like we had been rising forever. Chaos erupted outside. Then the terrible sound of silence. No more voices. No screams. Then the worst came the bumping of corpses all around us. It seemed like a week, and we would hear the thumping of a body against the walls of the ark.

Night and day we drifted. Sleep was hard at first. Then God mercifully gave us rest. We learned the drama of day and night all over again. The chores of keeping check on the animals helped pass the days. Each of the sons helped clear the rooms from the refuse. The wives all helped feed each set of creatures. We could open the window only long enough to dispose of the refuse. The rains never seemed to slacken.

In the evening at our mealtime, we would speak of how God had been good to us and spared our lives. I know now that my family believes in God. There is no doubt that this has brought them closer to him, and they will never doubt. I thank God for helping me build this ark. It preserved our lives. I cannot get over how large your room (sanctuary) is. It is as big as the ark God told me to build.

After forty days of constant rain and the sound of it beating down on the roof and against the sides of our cabins, the strangest thing silence. There were a few minutes of water flowing down the drainage openings on the deck. Then the sound of trickles and drips. THE RAIN STOPPED!

After an hour of staring at each other, we dared to open the window at the door. The world had become one great sea. There was no debris. No other vessel on the surface of the water. The sun was beginning to break through the clouds for the first time. We had to shield our eyes; they burned and hurt, but it was a good feeling. We all went out on the deck to sing and praise God.

I wondered how long it would take for us to see land again. So as soon as I thought that the ark was sinking in place, I sent out a raven. But it came back so soon. I knew to wait until I should try again. Then I sent out a dove. The dove soon returned, too. In another week I sent the dove again. This time it came back with a fresh olive leaf in its beak. There was dry land!

Then in another week I sent the dove again. This time she did not return. God spoke to me and told us to leave the ark and take the animals. We were to return to normal life. We were to be fruitful and multiply.

The sun and wind continued to do their job of drying the land. I took rocks and built an altar to praise God. Then I wondered if this could ever happen again. With all we

saw—the rain, the dead bodies, and the water all around us for so long.

Then God answered me. “I establish my COVENANT with you. Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” I was so relieved!

Then God gave us a sign of his covenant: a bow of colors that reached from the sky to the earth. Never had I seen such a sight! The bow was so beautiful. It seemed to shimmer in the light of the sun. We stood in awe of God’s sign. In my heart I continued to give thanks to God for such a precious promise.

We didn’t have the time to view the rainbow for long. There was much work to do: vineyards to plant, bread to bake, a house to build. Weeks and months passed. Then I wakened one night to what I believed was a nightmare. It was RAINING again.

The greatest fear of my life lifted with the dawn, and once again in the sky, there was the RAINBOW. God was true to his promise. Everything was all right. My family was safe. Even the animals quit their cries.

And now for 350 years, every time it rains, the Bow is there in the clouds. God is true to his promise. I have continued to thank him. My family gives God praise. We feel safe and secure. God is true to his promise.

If he helped me build such a ship, surely he will let my sons and daughters-in-law rebuild this world he loves so much.

You may not think God listens. He does. I have learned you can talk to God. I especially like to talk to God when it rains. Maybe you could try it the next time it rains. Yes, I mean talk to God. If you listen, he will TALK to you as well. Do you need proof? There is a line from the sky to the earth. A beautiful line of promise. You can actually see the promise of our God.

Praise his name.

Amen.

Let us pray: “God our Creator, giver of covenant love, we thank you for sparing our lives and sending us covenant blessings. Father into our lives you have given us the showers of blessings; we are here today to thank you for never forgetting and forgiving us our sins. And thank you father for giving us the one who lived perfectly covenant faith, Jesus the Christ, the sign of your new covenant. Thank you Father for your promise that is what your word means. The testament is a promise, and when we couldn’t live out the promise, your son did. And by the power of your Spirit now send your covenant love and faith now to these your people that in their lives it may be as beautiful as the bow in the cloud. Send once again the joy of your salvation to the people of the earth. And we will be your thankful people. Amen.”

My brothers and sisters, I am glad to share with you this little insight into a real person. I want to remind you of something, that Noah had no church, had no Scripture to follow, all he had was God’s promise to him. And he believed it, and God was true to his promise.

Invitation. Closing hymn.

DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL: Sermon One: September 1-7

Sunday:

1. When was the last time you saw a rainbow? Have you ever witnessed a “double rainbow”? Did the rainbow bring to your mind the promises of God- His Covenant of Grace?
2. Prayer is the vehicle for “communication” with God. Take some time to “pray.”

Monday:

1. What would have been your reaction if God had told you to build something as unusual as an ark?
2. Do you relate to Noah’s questions about God’s decision to destroy the earth?
3. Have you ever been faced with an “impossible” task and all you had to go on was “faith”?

Tuesday:

1. Has prayer ever helped you do the “impossible”?
2. Read Hebrews 11:7.
3. Prayer is how we can follow the example of Noah. What is God “telling” you to do for Him?

Wednesday:

1. Review Genesis 9:8-13.
2. What does the word “covenant” mean in your life of faith?
3. Pray to receive a greater understanding of God’s promises.

Thursday:

1. Read Matthew 24:37-39. What insights do you gain from the text?
2. Does “prayer” play a part in your daily routine?

Friday:

1. Read Luke 3:23, 36; and Luke 17:26, 27. Does this Scripture provide new understanding?
2. Spend some “quality” time in prayer.

Saturday:

Sabbath time. Rest. Relax. Rejoice in the promises of God.

Second Sermon: “Preaching the Doctrine of Covenant and Its Impact upon the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer”

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-6; 17: 1-8; 21:1-3; 22:1-14

Sermon: “Keeping Hope When God’s Promise Is Delayed”

Date: Sunday, 8 September 2002

Preacher: John Keith Franklin, Pastor: Tryon United Methodist Church

I was called Abram now Abraham. Descendent of Shem, son of Terah. My name means “Yahweh is exalted.” The friend of God. Some friend! God told me I am to be the father of multitudes, of many nations! But I am still WAITING!

Thankfully I have a good wife, Sarah. She has followed me. God told me to leave my country and kindred, and he would give us a new land. He would bless those who bless us and curse those who curse us. So far all we have realized is God seems to be running out of time.

There was a time that Sarah got tired of waiting. She gave me her slave woman Hagar to have a child through her. We thought it would work. A child was born a fine son Ishmael. But God told me that he was not the child of promise. God said “my own son shall be my heir.” Then God took me out one lonely night when the night sky was as black as silk screen and the stars were as bright as diamonds against the screen. There were millions of stars in the heavens. Here God told me, “So shall your descendents be.”

I believed God. I still believe. Even though I often grow weary of waiting. I will not give up on God. He has taken care of this old man and woman a long time. He can still bring it to pass.

It was a special birthday. One I will never forget. God spoke to me again and assured me of his COVENANT. This is when he changed my name to Abraham. He said even kings would come forth from me. Imagine that! Royal blood from my body! And that was not all God was going to give us the land of Canaan for ever. All I know is that when God makes a promise, it is no little thing. He is a big God; let me tell you how I

know.

Once there were three strangers that came to our tent. I told Sarah to prepare the finest wheat for bread. I took a good calf and had the servant prepare it. I took curds and milk and the best wine and honored these three sojourners within our home. God spoke through them to our heartache. They said they would return in the spring, and Sarah would have a child! I laughed. Later they repeated the same promise. This time Sarah was hiding in the door-flap of the tent, and she laughed. The three strangers asked her why she laughed. She denied laughing. After all she was near ninety years of age. How was it possible that she could have a fruitful womb? But the strangers did not take her denial. They spoke directly to her: “You laughed.”

In the fall Sarah was seemingly restless. She was irritable. Her health was not good. Every morning she was sick. Then she began to gain weight. I thought it was because she was always eating the stored grain. One day I confronted her, and she seemed to awaken as from a dream. “I am with child,” she said. This was too good to be true. After our fears had subsided, we looked at each other and laughed. Imagine at our age parents! There was finally something that set us apart from all the other people our age. I had visions building a small bed. Sarah was cutting up cloth for the baby. A baby!

May Yahweh be exalted! A child. We pray it be a son! The one we were promised. The one God said would come. Our God was true to his promises.

When this blessed child was born, it was a holy moment. There in the stillness of night, inside our simple tent, God performed a greater miracle than all the stars in the sky. A more overwhelming feat than the millions of grains of sand that border the sea. God brought flesh and blood from our withered bodies. And when I saw that little one and heard the first cry of his lips, my heart sang for joy. Sarah was crying and laughing at the

same time. I could not control myself. I held him in my arms and fell to my knees in worship.

Our child. Our child! Sarah, this is our son! Look what you and I created. Look what God has given to us the God whose promise is true. What shall we call him? What name is worthy enough of this miracle? Speak, Sarah, I, your husband, want to know. What will you call your son?

And from her fevered lips, dry and cracked, she raised up on her elbows and almost shouted. ISAAC. His name is ISAAC laughter! And she fell back and quietly laughed herself to sleep.

I know I shouldn't have, but I wrapped him up warmly and took him out into the night. It was before God that I praised his name. I could not stop with my praise. I held my son up as an offering to God. I vowed that he would be my offering to God. Little did I know that God not only heard my prayer, he took me up on it.

When our Isaac was of age. God spoke to me again. He told me to take our son, our only son, Isaac and go to the land of Morah and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains. What could I do? God had given him to us and that proved that God was true to his promise.

I had every reason to cry out to God. I was screaming inside. Our God was supposed to be different from all the other gods that required a human sacrifice. Why was God requiring this of me. I could not tell Sarah. She would have gone insane. I only told her we were going to worship and that WE would return.

And my son Isaac came with the servants. There we journeyed to the place of sacrifice. My son wanted to help. God be merciful. He doesn't know what you have asked. He wanted to carry the wood for the burnt offering.

I quickly hid my best knife under my robe. I made the servants wait while me and the boy scaled the side of that godforsaken mountain.

I prepared the altar. I took my time. It seemed that the job ended too quickly. My son asked, "But father where is the lamb for the sacrifice?" I could only sigh and say, "My son, God himself will provide the sacrifice."

The next act was the most horrible I have ever performed. I tied this precious boy to the wood on the altar. I gave him one last look and it was as if I could not see him. Then I closed my eyes and shuddered as I took the knife from my cloak. When I raised the blade at its highest by my outstretched arm, I heard the sweetest words in all my life.

God spoke to me: "Abraham, Abraham. Do not lay our hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know you fear God. You have not withheld your only son from me."

And off in the thicket I heard the bleating of a ram. He was caught in the underbrush. And just as God promised, he came through. The deed only took minutes, but they seemed longer than the many years Sarah and I waited on the birth of our son.

Time must not mean anything to this God of ours. The only thing I know is that he is true to what he has promised. This you can rely on. Believe God.

I have lived a good long life. I am in my 175 year. My prayer is to be buried with my people and have Isaac and Ishmael gather their children before me one more time. I see the future in their eyes. I tell them the stories of God. How God was the one who promised what seemed impossible to me and yet here they are!

I can close my eyes. I am at peace. God will indeed make me father of many nations. My sons will see to that. Their sons and their son's sons will be fruitful.

I have a message for you, my friend. Our God is listening. You can speak to this

powerful God. He hears the voices of people. He is sure to bless. Look at your children's faces, and you will see.

My name is Abraham. My name means "Yahweh is exalted." I am the father of a nation of God's people. God's name be praised.

Amen.

Once again we have looked briefly into the lives of two people, like Noah and his wife, Abraham and Sarah waited for God's promise. God made a covenant with them. Covenant is God's promise, and in that promise God told them that they would have a child. And they waited all their life long, through difficult times, and they were willing to sacrifice. And by faith, Abraham was willing to give his child to God. And in his eyes that child was as good as dead when they went up on the mountain to worship. But God spared Isaac and returned him to his father and mother. And because he was spared, there was a lamb that was provided. And I share with you today the greatest covenant of all. It is God's covenant, the new covenant, in Jesus his Son, who was the lamb slain from the foundation of the world. And he took our place on the altar of sacrifice called Calvary. And he shed his blood, and because of his perfect sacrifice, you and I can be delivered from the law of sin and death and hell to eternal life. And so if you have believed God's promise, you have received the Son, the bright and morning star. So no matter how long we live, we have a promise that we will be born into eternal life. And so it is our prayer today that you will enter into eternal life through that child that was born to be a sacrifice, Jesus Christ.

Let us pray: "Father in heaven, you are the covenant maker and the covenant keeper. We are your children, prone to break your covenant, so we ask you Lord to help us keep the promise through Christ. Let his righteousness live through us and so his

sweetness will pour forth. O Lord, help us to receive your covenant through Christ. And then by the power of your Spirit, help us to follow the good shepherd, Jesus, into life abundant and life eternal. We give you thanks and praise. Amen.”

Invitation. Hymn.

DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL: Sermon Two: September 8-14

Sunday:

1. When was the last time you really “looked” at your children or grandchildren? If you do not have a child, look at the face of a child in a crowd or a magazine. Did the time looking at a child bring to your mind the promises of God His Covenant of Grace?
2. Prayer can put us “in touch” with this God of promises. Take some time to “pray.”

Monday:

1. Can you relate to the experience of “waiting” on God like that of Abraham and Sarah?
2. How long should we “wait” on God to bring His promises to fulfillment?
3. Have you ever been asked to “sacrifice” your dream because of faith?

Tuesday:

1. What does the story of Isaac’s sacrifice say about the nature of God’s love?
2. Read Hebrews 11:8-10.
3. Prayer is how we can follow the example of Abraham and Sarah. What is God “telling” you to do for Him?

Wednesday:

1. Review Genesis 22:9-14.
2. What does the word “covenant” mean in your life of faith?
3. Pray to receive a greater understanding of God’s promises.

Thursday:

1. Read John 8:56; and Romans 4:1-12.
2. Does “prayer” play a significant part in your daily routine?

Friday:

1. Read James 2:21-33; and Galatians 3:7, 29; Psalms 105:6, 9-11
2. Spend some “quality” time in prayer.

Saturday:

Sabbath time. Rest. Relax. Rejoice in the promises of God.

Third Sermon: “Preaching the Doctrine of Covenant and Its Impact upon the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer”

Scripture: Exodus 2, 3, 12, 24, and Deuteronomy 34

Sermon: “Boundary Words and Freedom”

Date: Sunday, 15 September 2002

Preacher: John Keith Franklin, Pastor: Tryon United Methodist Church

These are the clothes I will be buried in. The simple cloak of a Bedouin shepherd. But I remember the days when I was dressed in the finest cotton and silk of Egypt. A solid gold amulet was on my arm. A scarab as large as a pomegranate in the center of my head dress. I was a prince of Egypt. Pharaoh’s daughter drew me out of the Nile after my true mother Jochabed placed me there to spare my life.

I am Moses. A Hebrew. One day God took from shepherding and led me to return to the palaces from which my days of pride and splendor had passed. This time I was not to be the conqueror. God conquered the heart of Pharaoh, and he finally let God’s people, the children of Israel, go. And what a journey it has been.

I am standing on this mountain for the last time. Mount Nebo is high above the plains of Moab. This place is called Pisgah, and I can see the Jordan River and beyond that is the Promised Land God gave our people. I will never go there. My work is done. I have faithfully led God’s people from slavery and through the wilderness and put up with all their ups and downs of faith.

Years ago I stood here. That was the day God told me I would never set foot in the Promised Land. I had become angry at Meribah and disobeyed the Lord. I will never know what it is like to walk the fertile fields of Canaan.

But I remember another mountain and the time when I faithfully obeyed God. Sinai was the place where I saw that burning bush that was not consumed by fire. There I had my encounter with the Living God. God revealed to me his name “I AM, THAT I AM” and then told me I was to lead his people from the power of Pharaoh. It all seems so

incredible now. I remember being terrified of going back to Egypt. If God had not been with me, I would have had reason to fear.

I spoke what God commanded to Pharaoh. This man who was like a brother to me now looked at me as an enemy he hated me with a passion. He was determined to vindicate the idols of his foolish religion. His heart was hardened not just toward me but also toward the Living God. Only after God humbled him with the death of his firstborn did Pharaoh let God's people go. That was the night of our freedom. God told me to take a lamb and slay it and place the blood on the doorposts of the houses of Israel, and the death angel would pass over you and the firstborn of Egypt would die. In the morning light, Pharaoh's son lay dead. That is when he gave us our freedom.

So I led the Israelites out of Egypt, and as soon as the pyramids were out of their sight, they began to moan and groan and complain like children. "O Moses, we're thirsty, we're starving. Let's go back to Egypt at least there we had good food to eat." But God had greater trials ahead for me. Yes, it was Massah and Meribah where I slipped. I struck the rock at Meribah so that the water would flow from the source. God was displeased. Here I failed to demonstrate his power.

Fortunately it was on Mt. Sinai that was my greatest moment. The Lord spoke to me out of the cloud, and in his presence he gave me his word. They were written on tablets of stone, and I was to tell the people God's Law. I like to think of them as **BOUNDARY WORDS** words to live by that bring life and freedom:

1. The first four words tell us how to look at God there is only one God and we are to serve him only.

2. The second word says not to make anything an idol nothing should take the place of God.

3. The third word says we should not use God's name in vain.
4. The fourth word says we should keep the Sabbath day holy.
5. The next set of words tells us how to treat each other we are to honor our parents.
6. The sixth word is not to kill.
7. The seventh word is for married people to be faithful to one another.
8. The eighth word is not to steal.
9. The ninth word is not to tell lies.
10. The tenth word is not to covet others' possessions.

But as soon as I was descending the mountain, I saw the people dancing and sinning around a golden calf. None other than Aaron had fashioned the idol out of the gold tribute we took from Egypt. We were to use that gold to build a tabernacle for God, but the people in their immaturity returned to the worship of a false god. I was the angriest then I have ever been. Thankfully God was not displeased when I threw the stone tablets and broke them.

So I ground up the golden calf and made a powder and forced the people to drink their own disobedience. I ordered the Levites to kill thousands. Only when I pleaded with the Lord did he spare the people.

I still ask you God, why does it take your people so long to trust and obey? After forty years in a wilderness you'd think it would begin to sink in. But once again you were merciful and gave me the instruction to build the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle. The ark was wooden, and we overlaid it with gold. Into the ark we placed the holy tablets. The tent of meeting was carried everywhere we roamed, and the priests could come inside to the holy place and minister for the people.

I spent many hours in the tent because my prayers were lifted up to you night and day, God. And you faithfully gave me direction, and strength to lead your people. I suppose my years as a shepherd in Midian taught me the patience you required for the sake of your people.

Thank you God for standing with me though all the scenes of my life, when I was a proud pagan in the court of Pharaoh, the humble life of a shepherd, the years of danger fleeing Egypt and surviving in the wilderness with nothing but your promise to provide. My eyes have not grown dim, and now I see beyond this place and imagine the sweetest promises of all—your promise to give your people a land of milk and honey.

I can almost taste the freedom and abundance there. But I do not worry my spirit about your will. I will not go. I have accepted your will. My time of leading the Israelites is now past. I have planted seeds; others may reap a harvest.

From the best I can tell, the path will not be an easy one for your people. Yes, the land is good and fertile; there are vineyards and crops to gather. But there are other people there. People that do not know you—the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hitites, Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites. These will come against your people.

I pray now for Joshua. He will lead your people. He has the heart of a lion. He has the faith of twelve men. He will be strong and bow before you and not the enemies of the Holy One of Israel. You will give your people success. You will provide the victory!

As my eyes see this beautiful horizon for the last time, all I want to do is praise you my God. I praise you for letting me see the beauty of a shepherd's cloak, more beautiful than the silk of an Egyptian prince. I thank you that you redeemed a murderous heart. I thank you for a good wife and children. I thank you for giving me forty years to quietly think and pray. I thank you that you did not let me waste away in comfort but

challenged me to my very soul by facing my greatest enemy. I thank you for revealing yourself to me, and I thank you for the name you gave, "I am that I am." And that none ever questioned me again about your will.

Praise you Lord God for my life. My simple life. I have been prophet, priest, judge, lawgiver, intercessor, shepherd, guide, healer, leader, husband, father, child of the most high God. My only prayer is to be remembered as one who served the Lord.

Amen.

This morning we have briefly looked once again into the life of a real person who had God's promise and followed that promise. And by faith Moses followed God's word and promise. And you remember that Moses led God's people out of four hundred years of slavery. And God gave them the Passover lamb that lamb that was slain that let Israel pass from death to life. You and I have a greater blessing and a greater promise in Christ. He is the New Covenant. Do you remember that Jesus is the Passover Lamb? He was slain from the foundation of the world. If you have faith and accept what Jesus did on Calvary and his blood has been sprinkled on your heart, you have been made clean and passed from death to life. This is God's eternal covenant for you and for me. And here is how we know this is true. Do you remember in the Gospels Jesus once took Peter, James, and John and they went up with him on the mountain of Transfiguration? And Jesus appeared there with Moses, the Lawgiver, and Elijah, the great prophet, and they disappeared. But only Jesus remained in his glory. This was God's way to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets. So if you have received Jesus' promise, you will pass from death to life. This is God's eternal covenant. Jesus is our true prophet and priest at the right hand of the Father interceding for you and for me that we might receive God's covenant promise.

Let us pray: “Father we thank you for your precious promises and for your people that you have given an eternal covenant. Once more we celebrate your promise from passing from death to life. Let each one receive Jesus’ covenant, let us all believe and rejoice that we can speak to you and receive from you. That we can share our life and that you will give your life to us. We thank you now in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Invitation. Hymn.

DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL: Sermon Three: September 15-21

Sunday:

1. Have you had some “Promised Lands” you have seen but not entered?
2. Have you ever been a leader and found a group of people that were not appreciative of your efforts?
3. Prayer can be the source of “telling God all our disappointments” and finding He has something better in the plan. Take some “time” to pray.

Monday:

1. Have there been “mountain top” experiences in your life? Reflect upon them.
2. How did you feel when you had to “come down” back to the valley?
3. Has your time spent in prayer over these last three weeks been more “real”?

Tuesday:

1. Read Exodus 2:1-10
2. Try to imagine what life is like being “enslaved.” What are the modern things that can “enslave” us?
3. Pray that the power of God will “free” you from the bondage.

Wednesday:

1. Review Deuteronomy 34:1-8.
2. Have you grown to experience the word “covenant” in a new way?
3. Pray to receive a greater understanding of God’s promises.

Thursday:

1. Read Hebrews 3:2-5 and 11:23-27
2. Do you think that Moses had the time to “pray”?
3. Are you finding “time” to pray?

Friday:

1. Read Psalm 103:7; Matthew 17:3; Mark 9:4; John 9:28 What new insights do you gain?
2. Read Acts 7:20; 2 Corinthians 3:7; Jude 9; and Revelation 15:3. Do these Scriptures help you understand the life of Moses?
3. Spend some “quality” time in prayer.

Saturday:

Sabbath time. Rest. Relax. Rejoice in the promises of God.

Fourth Sermon: “Preaching the Doctrine of Covenant and Its Impact upon the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer”

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16; 2 Samuel 5; 7; 15; 18:28-33; 19:1-9 & Jeremiah

Sermon: “The King and the Promise of a New Covenant”

Date: Sunday, 22 September 2002

Preacher: John Keith Franklin, Pastor: Tryon United Methodist Church

I am King of all Judah and Israel and can command anything. But God knows that I have had to learn how to wait! And who knows, maybe God will again be merciful to me. This is by far the longest wait of my life. For I await news from the front lines. How will my monarchy fare? But there is even more urgent news I am waiting for: the fate of my beloved son, Absalom.

How far God has taken me from being just a poor shepherd boy in the fields of my father, Jesse. Then the prophet came and anointed me in the presence of my brothers and said that I would be king. This came to pass. God gave me victory over Goliath. Even delivered me from the murderous designs of King Saul. He gave me favor in battle, and I won many wives. Some I took that were not even mine. But God has forgiven me. I only wished that Absalom could forgive me. I know that I spent more time building a kingdom than being a good father. I should have intervened when Amnon forced himself upon his sister, Tamar. I was wrong. Absalom never forgot and never forgave.

Then Absalom raised up many of the people to follow him. He appealed to their needs. He certainly is a gifted leader. But I fear his motivation was anger and revenge, not the good of the people. But I forgave him. How I would have accepted him back to my embrace and forgotten the past. The Kingdom would have been his if only he had the patience to wait. The sword once again has cursed my family.

Now I await the power play of my young man, Absalom. With each breath I pray a prayer to God for sparing his life. My most skillful warriors may not be as merciful as I am.

Here is the messenger. “If he is alone, he is bringing tidings!” Then after a few minutes, another messenger who is running. It is Ahimaaz, son of Zadok. A good man. He will bring good news.

“All is well!” My mind is at ease. “Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who revolted against their King.” That is good, but that is not what I really want to know: “Is it well with the young man, Absalom?”

“May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who seek to do harm to you, suffer the same end met by that young man.” The words strike me like a sledge in the gut. I stagger to my bedchamber, crushed by the news.

My tears pour forth from my eyes. I am devastated. “O Absalom, my son! Why could I not have died in your place? Your blood is on my hands. If I had been a better father you would still be alive.”

How long, O Lord?
 How long will you hide your face from me?
 How long must I bear pain in my soul,
 And have sorrow in my heart?
 I have trusted in your steadfast love.
 Only in you is there salvation and refuge.
 Deliver me, O Lord, from my anguish. (from Psalm 13)

Second Part of the Sermon: Jeremiah

I didn’t want to preach doom and gloom to Israel. If I had my choice, my sermons would have been about peace and prosperity. Who really wants to be a prophet for God? But God called me when I was but a youth. My name is Jeremiah. They call me the “weeping prophet.” I would have rather died than have been despised so long by my own countrymen. But God’s Word must be given. I can do no other task.

God told me not to marry and have children. I have no real friend except Baruch,

who recorded God's Words for me. He is my source of comfort in this world. He will be by my side.

Can I help it that God said he would put the words in my mouth? He told me to speak to nations and kingdoms to pluck up and pull down, destroy and overthrow, build and plant. I got to do very little building and planting. Even though I was never really able to convince my countrymen it was their "sins" that caused me to deliver such strong rebukes from God. They have broken covenant with God. They forgot their purpose as God's people. They went after idols; they neglected the widows; they associated with the foreigner; they oppressed the poor.

There were moments though when I saw hope. King Josiah was a righteous man. He had found the lost scroll of the Torah, and a great reform followed. I thought we would now be on the path to follow God. Alas, but he was slain in a battle at Meggido.

The people rejected the reforms. Why are God's people so blind? Can't they see that repentance is their only hope? If they would turn from their evil ways and turn to the Lord, he would restore them. Time and time again I have learned the lesson of the potter's wheel God is our potter, and we are the clay in his hands. The Lord is forming us, shaping us, and we will be reworked until the potter is pleased with the creation.

When I prophesied that Babylon would conquer Judah and Israel, it was my lowest point in life. I was banned from the temple so I asked Baruch to read the Word of God to the King. The King was so upset he cut the scroll into pieces and burned them. I ran to the Temple and spoke an oracle of doom on the city. I was beaten and put into the stocks. In time the Lord delivered me, but King Nebuchadnezzar from Babylon conquered us anyway.

While we were under siege, the Lord instructed me to wear a yoke to symbolize

the fact we were going to be in bondage. Hannaniah publicly challenged me and preached a false message. I took the yoke and broke it into pieces and returned with a yoke of iron!

When Jerusalem's walls were breached and Baruch and I taken prisoner, we were taken to Egypt against our will. I continued to speak the strong word of condemnation to any and all nations. All of them were under the Lord's judgment.

Now here at the end of my life, the Lord has put the word of hope into my mouth. I have prophesied the return of our exiles. Jerusalem will once again be a glorious city. The Lord has not forgotten or forsaken his people. I only hope that someone will remember the greatest word God ever gave me:

But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel
After those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and
I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall
Be my people. (Jer. 31: 33)

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the
Promise made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those
Days I will cause a righteous Branch to spring forth for David; and he
Shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah
Will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in security. And this is the name
By which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness." (Jer. 33:14-
16)

Amen.

Brothers and sisters we have shared again this morning briefly the lives of two people, two very different people. A king that had all the world's riches and a poor man that had nothing. But what they had in common was God's Word. Do you remember God's promise to them both? Do you remember that David, a King, who had done so much good in his life, and so many things that were terrible, but God had given him forgiveness and restoration? David had one desire in his life; he wanted to build a house for God. But God said no because he had shed blood by the sword. But God made David

a better promise. God said, “David I will build for you a house, and I will put one of your descendants on the throne of Israel.”

And do you remember the words of the prophet Jeremiah? Who confirmed the word of God? He said, “A righteous branch will spring forth from David, one who would execute justice and righteousness, that is the one who is coming? And his name? The Lord, the Lord is our righteousness.

A young couple journeyed from Nazareth and journeyed to Bethlehem because they were of the house and lineage of King David. And Mary delivered her firstborn son Jesus and laid him in a manger. And do you remember that Wise Men came from the East with royal gifts for the baby king? Gold, frankincense, and myrrh? And those gifts were so important because they were his ransom, because an evil king was afraid that someone would take his throne. So Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt to protect the young king’s life. And when news came that the evil king was dead, they came back to Nazareth, and there Jesus grew in stature before God and man. And at age thirty Jesus began his earthly ministry, the ministry of his father, God.

And throughout his ministry, Jesus talked about the kingdom. He said the kingdom was near unto us. The kingdom was within us. The kingdom was yet to be and was yet with us. How does that happen? He talked about a change in our lives.

People around him came to recognize he was the Messiah of Israel. There were others that hated him for this. Those in the religious establishment, those in the government. So they questioned him. “Are you the king of the Jews?” Pilate said. And Jesus said, “Yes, you have said so. They beat him and scourged him and put a crown of thorns upon his head. And they ascended him on a new throne on Calvary. And there he died. But remember on the third day he walked triumphant out of the grave to prove he is

the king. The Son of God. He is prophet and priest and king.

And he ascended to the Father and is at the right hand of the Father on his throne. If you believe Jesus is the king, you will receive the covenant of eternal life. You must remember inside of us is our heart. The question is, “Who is king of your heart?” Have you submitted to him out of love? If you have received the king’s gracious invitation?

The King of Love our shepherd is. His mercy never faileth. If you receive him you will be the son or daughter of royalty. Is Jesus your king?

Let us pray: “Heavenly Father, we want to thank you for all within this place have come seeking to be with you. We know that you are always present. But we pray that today that you would reveal yourself today and the mighty King of Love. Lord, whatever our hearts search for, help us to find ourselves in thee. Lord, your invitation today is for everyone that they might receive you as their king and know that they will pass from death to life. We pray that Jesus is on the throne of our lives today.”

Invitation. Hymn.

DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL: Sermon Four: September 22-28

Sunday:

1. Have you experienced anxiety-filled periods “waiting” on God? Was it for a child or another loved one?
2. Was there a time you had the courage to speak the “strong” word to another knowing in your heart you were in God’s will?
3. Prayer can be the refuge we need when the situation is difficult. Take some “time” to pray about your most recent difficulty.

Monday:

1. When was the last time you were exasperated with someone?
2. Have you approached them in “love” out of concern? Did you pay a price?
3. Has your prayer time been a source of renewal and assurance of God’s love?

Tuesday:

1. Read 2 Samuel 7:4-17 and Jeremiah 31:31-34.
2. Try to picture God’s covenant as designed with your needs in mind.
3. Pray that the power of God will fill you with assurance of his covenant relationship.

Wednesday:

1. Review David and Jeremiah’s life with God. What do they have in common?
2. Have you ever “prayed” one of the Psalms?
3. Spend some time “praying” Psalm 23.

Thursday:

1. Read Matthew 1:1; Luke 20:41; and John 7:42. What insights did you receive?
2. Read Jeremiah 27:1 and Jeremiah 33:14-16. What do these verses say about prayer?

Friday:

1. Read Acts 2:25 and 2 Timothy 2:8. What insights do you receive?
2. Read Jeremiah 9:25, 26 and Jeremiah 23:5, 6
3. Spend some “quality” time in prayer.

Saturday:

Sabbath time. Rest. Relax. Rejoice in the promises of God.

Fifth Sermon: “Preaching the Doctrine of Covenant and Its Impact upon the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer”

Scripture: Matthew 3; Mark 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-21; John 1:19-34

Sermon: “Come Clean and Join the Family”

Date: Sunday, 29 September 2002

Preacher: John Keith Franklin, Pastor: Tryon United Methodist Church

I am drawn to the wilderness to be alone with you Father. Then your voice I hear, speaking through a man: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Your kingdom here in this desert place? But I remember that it was how you delivered your people Israel after wandering for forty years in the wilderness. They crossed over the water of Jordan to a Promised Land.

What is that ahead? The Jordan River. And this man is standing there. He is clothed so strangely. That is not cloth but skins he is wearing. His hair is so long. He has never shaved his beard. I hear him speak “like the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”

I know him he is my cousin, John. Yes, Father. You have raised him up for such a precious work. Like your prophets of old, John will declare your truth. Let me draw nearer and hear his words.

Why are we always drawn to water? What is it about you, Father, that you are bent on giving us such great insights through the gift of water? Was it not in the water of Mary’s womb that I was given flesh and blood? My birth was foretold and celebrated in the Temple by the faithful Simeon and Anna. They told my mother and father, Joseph and Mary, I was the one that was set for the rising and falling of many in Israel.

How I loved to listen to my parents talk about fleeing to Egypt and crossing that same Red Sea where you did your miracle of deliverance for Moses and the children of Israel after freeing them from Pharaoh’s slavery. Thanks be to God.

I am drawn to the river. Water is the gift that teaches us about your grace. Water,

the delicious gift when Mary would bring the refreshing drink to us in the carpenter shop. Water so cool and soothing. Water that is the daily provision to clean, prepare food, clean clothes, our bodies. Yes, you gave us so much water in this human form we are brother and sister to the creation, this planet. Water, necessary for life to be sustained. And then, there is the other side of water just a few teaspoons in the wrong place can bring instant, suffocating, terrifying death.

I hear John's words, YOUR word, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. An invitation to death. Die to self. Come to me. Come to death of yourself to receive my life. I hear your word, Father."

All of Abraham's children fear water. The picture of the surging, dark, bubbling chaos of nothingness and death. Before you separated the firmaments. Dry land appears. You gave humanity the beautiful garden of Eden and the four rivers that were sources of life. Then it was in Noah's day that you used the deluge to destroy the world and begin again. No one listened to Noah's cry of repentance.

But it was on the waters of the flood that Noah and his family floated in the Ark that saved them and the creatures. You saved a remnant; you gave a covenant, a promise not to destroy again by water.

Yes, Father. Thank you for your truth. Water may call us to death. Indeed we must die to self, but the water will not destroy us for we will live in newness of life. The water of this baptism will redeem us.

I hear the words of John, YOUR words: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

I will go to John. I will see John as the one you have used to prepare for the kingdom you sent me to proclaim. In my heart the banks of the Jordan are all the scenes

of water and your story of salvation history. I am now in the place before my cousin, John.

He sees me for who I am. "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" I must answer him: "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

I feel the water over me. I feel the nearness of your presence. I feel the coolness of your touch. I feel the love you have for me and all your children. I feel as though the pulse of eternity is sounding in the dripping of the water.

I know that this is only the beginning. I know that baptism is life, only by death. I know you will have John declare the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. Will he say it? Will he? Give me a sign, Father.

And now there is an opening in the clouds, and a dove is descending. The gentle dove of your Spirit is now upon my shoulder like your touch of reassurance. Then your voice, Father, I know it is you speaking: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to him."

I know who I am. I know whose I am. My purpose is clear. I am to call together a community of your children. They must come to know who you want them to be. And this sign of baptism will be the reminder of all you have done, are doing, and will do.

Somehow this baptism is the center of my life. This center is there for each one I will call to follow me. I will teach, and preach, and heal so that by their baptism they will know you, Father.

Now you call me apart. Another wilderness before I begin. Or can it be that this wilderness only reflects the wilderness of the temptations your people must face every day. But there is one unchangeable truth. Your grace is sufficient. Your grace is seen in

every story of deliverance in faith. Your sign of covenant love is there in this baptism.

Let me go away to pray, Father. I hear you call. I am not afraid of the tempter's power. I am clean. Whole. I am loved. I have your Spirit. May those who follow me now know that water is the sign of belonging to you.

Water. New life. Your grace. Purity. Yes, it is your covenant. The water and blood of a sacrifice will be mine to give. Your children will be one in the water. Your children will be free.

Today we have looked briefly at the baptism of Jesus and are reminded that baptism is the means that God uses to assure us we are no longer strangers to his kingdom but citizens of his household. This sacrament the gift of God's grace, a symbol pointing to something beyond itself is a visible way of proclaiming the gospel.

Just as Jesus chose his disciples, baptism reminds us we, too, are chosen. It is God who calls and saves us. Not because we are deserving, but because God is gracious.

In the story of God's eternal love, water is used to instruct us in God's salvation history: Creation, Deluge, Exodus and in the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan River. Because God is gracious, he seeks the salvation of all people. And in baptism we are not only given privilege but responsibility as the family of God. Baptism is not a contract but a covenant, the PROMISE of God's grace. An affirmation of all that God has done in Jesus Christ. Our initiation into the church, cleansing, salvation, sustaining, glorification. Whether we sprinkle, immerse, or pour the water, it is only a physical symbol of something more spiritual the blood sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary. As Jesus told Nicodemus, you must be born of water and the blood. Only blood can atone for sin. Our baptism is not about water on our head but about the blood of Jesus covering our hearts.

And about God's PROMISE for us to pass from death to life.

Let us pray: "Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of water and the covenant of the Father's love. Be poured out upon us Holy Spirit as we remember our baptism and give thanks. Amen."

End worship with: "Congregational Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant"
United Methodist Hymnal # 50.

DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL: Sermon Five: September 29- October 5

Sunday:

1. Have you been told about the day of your Baptism? Do you have memories because you were older when baptized?
2. If you have never been baptized, are you desirous to share in this sacrament?
3. Prayer surrounds the gift of God in the sacrament of Baptism. Spend some “time” giving thanks for your experience of Baptism.

Monday:

1. Have you thought about the connections between death and Baptism?
2. Have you considered the act of Baptism is like Resurrection?
3. Prayer helps us deal with the hopes and fears of living and dying. Have you been able to experience this comfort in prayer?

Tuesday:

1. Reread Mark 1:1-13.
2. Try to “picture” the scene of Jesus’ baptism in your “mind’s eye.”
3. The Scriptures can be “prayed” as we study them. Have you ever tried to “pray” a Scripture story such as Jesus’ Baptism?

Wednesday:

1. Read Acts 2:1; Ephesians 4:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13. What insights do you receive?
2. How is your time for prayer been going the past several weeks. More? Less? Are you experiencing any difficulties in prayer?

Thursday:

1. Read Galatians 3:27, 28; John 3:3, 5, 6. What insights do you receive?
2. Pick one thing in your prayer life that you rejoice in or have difficulty with and make it a matter of further prayer.
3. Do you ever need to speak to your pastor about help with prayer?

Friday:

1. Read Romans 6:3, 4, 11; Colossians 2:12; and Hebrews 6:2. What new insights have you received?
2. When are your best “times” for prayer? Mornings? During the day? Night?

Saturday:

Sabbath time. Rest. Relax. Rejoice in the promises of God.

Sixth Sermon: “Preaching the Doctrine of Covenant and Its Impact upon the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer”

Scripture: Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-23; John 13:1-30

Sermon: “Soul Food”

Date: Sunday, 6 October 2002

Preacher: John Keith Franklin, Pastor: Tryon United Methodist Church

Yes, this table will do. We can share the Passover here on this table. I have seen many tables. This one will be the last on earth. My earthly father Joseph and I made many tables. They were some of my favorite pieces of furniture to make.

Even the poorest people want a table. They are simple in design, but each is sacred in a sense. After all people can eat standing up. But when you sit at table then fellowship, community, relationship take on a new meaning. I remember the happy hours at table with my parents Joseph and Mary, how we would share the Passover meal together. There I learned to write the alphabet. I was able to read one of the scrolls we had in the home. That table was made by my earthly father, and it was solid through and through. This table before me is not as well made, but here will be my last meal with these disciples.

I remember other tables. Some of my favorite times were with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Martha fussed so over the table when I came for a meal. But I know she was giving her best. Then there was the table that night in the home of a Pharisee and the woman of the street came in and poured perfume on my feet and wiped them with her tears and hair. If only these disciples remembered that night then they would understand what I am about to do.

But I remember that Canaanite woman who wanted her daughter healed, and I told her it was not fair to take the children’s food and toss it to the dogs. “Yes, Lord,” the woman answered, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (Matthew 15:21-28). She understood. I wished my disciples remembered her tonight.

Now the time has come. We share the Passover meal. We remember the covenant of God to his people, Israel. I want these disciples to understand that this table tonight will be forever different. There will be a new covenant. This is why I choose now to reveal to them the Father's love.

There they sit. Still loudly talking and sparring over who will be the "greatest" in the coming reign! They still do not understand. They are simply hungry. Physical hunger and the hunger caused by pride and the lust for power. They have so much to learn. This is why I take the Passover meal to let them REMEMBER. If one wants to be the greatest, he must become servant of all.

In a few short hours, I know what is ahead. The lessons will come fast and furious. They will see me submit to the Father's ultimate will. They will see me seemingly submit to Pilate's will. They will not know the Father's will until after my death and resurrection. Then they will remember. They will remember this meal. The bread, the wine.

Now we eat. We recount the ancient words of covenant in the Passover. And now I take the bread. Unleavened bread. I say to the disciples, "This is my body, broken for you. Eat, in remembrance of me." I hear the murmuring. The questions. They heard me. They do not understand. But I will not tell them. They will soon understand all too well.

Now the supper is over. I take the cup of wine. I speak to them again: "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." I hear the whispers that are shaken: "Blood?" "His blood?" The Master's blood?" Now they will remember. My body, my blood. How could a righteous Jew drink blood?

I tell them quickly that I am about to be betrayed, and the betrayer is there with us at the table. They all ask who the guilty one is. I tell them it is the one I dip bread with in

the dish. Then Judas takes the money bag and heads out quickly into the night. The end will be near.

Now I can share freely with the rest what to expect. I teach them my final lessons. I adjourn them to the Mount of Olives and ask them to join me in prayer. Then the end will come. Judas and the murderous band from the Temple guard will do the Sanhedrin's dirty work. I will be taken to the Roman officials and surely be crucified.

Each time my people gather it is around a table. That table is there because of my body and blood. Broken on a cross. Death. A tomb for a grave. Then new life! And each time my people eat this new covenant meal, I will come to mind just as those two lonely disciples walking to Emmaus came to see me at table. It was late, and they wanted me to stay. I am the host who breaks the bread, and they recognize my presence. I am there in the sharing of the cup. I am alive.

Why is it so often that my children refuse to come to the table where I have set the feast of victory? What prevents them from sharing my love? Could it be that they do not know that their longing, disappointment, I have shared long ago. I know this is a simple ceremony. But this is no ordinary meal. This is no ordinary food. This is "My Table."

This table reaches from this shabby Upper Room in Jerusalem to the great cathedrals of the world. This table is shared in mud huts in Africa and the block building of South America. This table is shared on the jeep hoods of soldiers in the field or hospital beds in Asia. This table reaches to the thousands gathered in conferences of the great denominations, and this table is the same in the small churches that dot the countryside of rural America.

This table where these twelve men sit. This table will reach across the world. Hundreds of millions share this table somewhere around the world every day. They

REMEMBER ME: “The body of our Lord, broken for you. The blood of our Lord, shed for you.”

In those moments all of eternity breaks open. Such a simple thing. THIS TABLE. A morsel of bread, a drop of wine. And for that one. YOU, dear child, I am present.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Today, friends, we have looked briefly at this wonderful sacrament God has given us. In this we are his people, to remember Jesus, in this we are commanded to love him. This is a perpetual memorial to him in every generation. We give the sacrifice of praise. Why? Because Jesus laid down his life and said we must eat his flesh and drink his blood to be part of him. The world cannot understand this mystery, the great love that the Father has given. But every time we share in communion, this holy food, we are given the strength we need. You see he welcomes us. Everyone is welcome at his table because he understands us and all of our hungers. Our sins and our failures pass away if we come with faith. See this is God’s promise, God’s covenant. Not that we are worthy. None are worthy to come to the table, but all are welcome at the table. He died in our place. We come by faith, knowing that he is present unto us. United Methodists celebrate “open communion” meaning all are welcome at the Lord’s Table. Our founder in the faith, John Wesley, believed wonderful things happened when people came to the Table of the Lord. In fact he encouraged his people to receive communion often. Why? Because it is the gospel in its purest form. We are given strength, comfort because we commune with him.

Let us pray: “Now Lord, we come to your Table. We are hungry for the assurance of your blessed covenant. These moments when we especially celebrate communion. Help us pray the grateful prayer of Eucharist. May our hearts and souls rejoice. Feed us till we want no more. Feed us till we want no more. Amen.”

Let us share the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. #12 in the United Methodist Hymnal.

DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL: Sermon Six: October 6-12

Sunday:

1. What was your favorite meal or table experience from childhood?
2. Do you remember your first time to share the Lord's Supper?
3. Prayer is often a part of a meal experience. We call it "grace." Why do you think that word is so appropriate?

Monday:

1. Have you ever shared the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in a different church? How was it celebrated? What things were familiar to you?
2. Long ago in United Methodist "class meetings" the people had to "spiritually prepare" to receive communion. What do you think they did?
3. Prayer is one of the best "preparations" for sharing the sacraments. Spend some time in prayer giving thanks for your participation in the Lord's Supper.

Tuesday:

1. Reread Luke 22:14-20.
2. Try to "imagine" being there with the Lord and his disciples.
3. In your prayer time, do you ever give thanks for the number of times you have shared Holy Communion?

Wednesday:

1. Read Matthew 26:26-29; Acts 2:42, 46. What insights do you receive?
2. How is your time for prayer been going? Have you experienced a greater sense of focus in prayer? Do you experience problems?
3. If you are making progress in prayer, give thanks. If you are "stuck," make this a matter of prayer. Simply be honest with God.

Thursday:

1. Read 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:20, 23-26. What insights do you receive?
2. Spend the rest of your time in prayer.

Friday:

1. Read John 6:26-58. What spiritual insights do you receive from the text?
2. Do you look forward to your time in prayer each day?

Saturday:

Sabbath time. Rest. Relax. Rejoice in the promises of God.

Seventh Sermon: “Preaching the Doctrine of Covenant and Its Impact upon the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer”

Scripture: Matthew 26:30-56; Matthew 26:69-75; Matthew 27:27-54; Matthew 28:1-10; Mark 15:16-47; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 23:26-56; Luke 24:1-11; John 19; 20; 21; Psalm 22
Sermon: “New Life by Death”

Date: Sunday, 13 October 2002

Preacher: John Keith Franklin, Pastor: Tryon United Methodist Church

I had never seen him like this. He was sweating and praying. Looking back now I should have realized that something was wrong. That everything was going to change. After all he tried to tell us and I would not believe him. My name is Peter, one of Jesus’ disciples. He told us that was the night that he was going to die and that we would all leave him. I swore that I never would leave his side. He told me that before daybreak that I would deny him three times and the cock would crow. I could not imagine it.

Then everything seemed to happen so quickly. We went to our usual spot to pray. The olive grove of Gethsemane. We were so tired we could not stay awake to pray with him. He roused us a few times. I remember the sweating and what looked like blood upon his forehead. But I fell back to sleep, only to be roused quickly when I heard the crowd.

They came with clubs and spears like they were after a common criminal. I could not believe it. Judas headed the pack. They attacked Jesus so I grabbed a sword and cut off the ear of Malchius, one of the guards. Jesus simply reattached his ear. He told us those that lived by the sword would die by the sword. And then they took him away. Why didn’t they take us, too? It would have been easier.

So a few of us followed at a distance. They took Jesus to Caiaphas. While they were interrogating Jesus, I was outside at a fire and a young girl came and said, “You were with Jesus of Galilee.” I denied it. Another girl recognized me and said, “This man was with the one from Nazareth. I denied it with an oath. Other people spoke up and said I was one of his, and I invoked a curse on them and denied even knowing Jesus.

Immediately the cock crowed. They led Jesus out of the house. And he LOOKED at me. I remembered what he said. I HAVE DENIED MY LORD. I DENIED JESUS. I ran as fast as I could. Crying. I denied my Lord. God have mercy on me.

I am so tired. I cannot bear it. No sleep. The questions. Over and over again. I have denied nothing. I am innocent of all these accusations. From Caiaphas to Pilate and over and over again. The beating, the scourging. The abuse. Humiliation.

Then they put a robe on me and crown of thorns. A reed in my hand. They spat upon me and pulled out my beard. My eyes are swollen shut from the beatings. My back is raw and bleeding.

That road in the middle of town, the Via Delarosa. The way of sorrows. O Jerusalem. Let your daughters cry now. Let them wail. You would not come to me. So I will give my all for you. Let them take me now. It is the Father's plan. I yield to his way.

They have stripped me now, and I am submitting to the God who gave me life, and now I lay my life down for others. I hear the nails. I feel the pain. I scream in agony. The torture is now complete. They raise the cross and let it fall into the hole with a thunderous "thump." The nails rip my hands and feet. I am not able to breathe. I will not last long this way.

"Eli. Eli, lama sabachtani." MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?

"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

"IT IS FINISHED." "Into your hands I commend my spirit."

"Peace be with you." I came to my disciples in the Upper Room. They were there just as I asked. All of them except one. Thomas the doubter. He said he would not believe

until he placed his hands in the print of the nails. I came again to let him see. He fell before me: “My Lord and my God.”

This was more than enough for all the disciples, except Peter. He was so impatient still. To cover his guilt he turned to the one thing he thought he knew how to do. Fishing. They all went along. They fished all night and caught nothing.

It was a beautiful morning when they came to shore empty handed. I asked them if they had a catch. They said no, and I told them to cast the nets on the right side of the boat, and they had so many they could not haul them in.

Peter then recognized me on the shore and immediately dove into the water and swam for shore. When they all arrived, I offered them the breakfast I had prepared on a charcoal fire.

They were all so quiet now. Especially Peter. So I asked him. “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” I said, “Feed my lambs.”

Again I asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” I said, “Tend my sheep.”

The third time I asked him, “Simon, son of John do you love me?” Peter was grieved that I asked him the third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” I said, “Feed my sheep.”

I came back to my disciples. I am alive. I live forevermore. And Peter did not believe that I had forgiven him. I died once for all sins. I love my own. I want them all to know of the Father’s grace. That was the power that brought me out of the tomb. Death has been defeated. Nothing can prevent YOU from experiencing the new life I give.

All I ask is this: “Do you love me?” “Do you love me more than these?”

My cross and empty tomb prove my love for you. If you accept this love, I only ask, "Follow me. Follow me."

Amen.

Friends, today we have looked briefly at the high point in our time of sharing covenant. For all that the Father promised in the covenants are fulfilled in Jesus. He is who he said he is. He is prophet, priest, and king. He is the Savior of the world. Because he lived, and died, and rose again, we too can live. It is our prayer always that each Sunday we would remember the power of the Resurrection. This is God's eternal covenant. A covenant for you.

Let us pray: "Dear Lord, help us to always remember that if we are only born once then we may die the second death. But if we are born twice then we only die once and will live forever. Help us to keep the cross before our eyes. Let us know that the empty tomb means we can experience the abundant life you came to bring. Life for today and forever. Amen."

DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL: Sermon Seven: October 13-19

Sunday:

1. Think about your favorite symbol of the cross. Was it in a piece of jewelry, a sanctuary? Maybe a stained glass window or painting?
2. Have you ever attended a Good Friday service? Did that bring the death of Jesus to your attention?
3. Praying or meditating upon the scene of Jesus' death can move us to a deeper appreciation of our Lord's sacrifice in our place. Give thanks for the cross.

Monday:

1. How are you around blood? Can you handle seeing a wound? What about your own blood? How does that make you feel?
2. Picture the most hideous scene of a bloody death in your mind. Have you ever tried to equate that with the cross of Jesus?
3. Praying or meditating upon the cross is something we can do throughout our lives. Give thanks for the cross.

Tuesday:

1. Have you ever thought that Israel needed an animal to "sacrifice" in order to worship God?
2. What if we had to make provision for the "slaughter of animals" in our worship today? What appeal would that have for you or others?
3. God's "New Covenant" is given in the cross of Jesus. Read Matthew 10:38-39
4. Read Ephesians 2:14-16. What does this say to you?
5. Spend some time in prayer.

Wednesday:

1. Read 1 Corinthians 1:17, 18. What new insights did you receive?
2. Read Mark 8:34; 10:21; and 15:21. What did the text say to you?
3. Prayer is a way we can experience the covenantal love of God. Have you grown in your understanding of the covenant?

Thursday:

1. Read John 19:17; Galatians 5:11; and 6:14; Ephesians 2:16. What did you gain?
2. Read Philippians 2:8; Colossians 1:20; and Hebrews 12:2. What did the Scripture say to you?
3. Prayer time.

Friday:

1. Have you been able to "listen" to God while praying?
2. Spend some time "listening."

Saturday:

Sabbath time. Rest. Relax. Rejoice in the promises of God.

Eighth Sermon: “Preaching the Doctrine of Covenant and Its Impact upon the Spiritual Disciple of Prayer”

Scripture: Acts 2:1-38; Joel 2:28-29

Sermon: “The Power to Live”

Date: Sunday, 20 October 2002

Preacher: John Keith Franklin, Pastor: Tryon United Methodist Church

I am convinced that God blessed us because we had been PRAYING. For ten days we stayed in the Upper Room, in prayer, and then HE came. The Holy Spirit came. “And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where we were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among us, and a tongue rested on each of us. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave us ability.” (Acts 2:2-4)

This was the birth of the Church. On the day of Pentecost, three thousand people came into the kingdom. It was only a sermon of two minutes. But the people were all amazed and asked two questions. First, “What does this mean?” No sooner did I tell them, the word of God penetrated their hearts, and they asked the second question, “What shall we do?”

That first question, “What does this mean?” I was able to share with them that this Pentecost day was what we had all dreamed of. God was bigger than we expected. The God that had been with us in Jesus, was now in the Holy Spirit and WITHIN us.

I remembered John the Baptist’s words that Jesus would come with a baptism of “fire.” This means a new day has come. God’s best gift for us all. The Holy Spirit is just as Joel said long ago: “for the young as well as he old, for the women as well as men, for the down and out as well as for those who seemed to have it all.” The days of special privilege are over. God wants to work in every life.

It wasn’t just that I was filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. I told them that the promise of God was to their children, their sons and daughters, and as many

as the Lord our God shall call. The coming of the Holy Spirit is like a new creation. It is the wakening of life from the dead. It is now the re-created life that will follow God's will, if they would receive.

Too many people ask the questions in the wrong order. They say "What shall we do?" before they know what faith means. So they have such a small idea of what the Holy Spirit can do in their lives. They may think this day was something that happened long ago and the days of power are over with.

That is why it is so sad that people come to church and are not amazed. They do not wonder; they are not perplexed. So much of what they see outside the church, they find inside because people are still the same.

When the people asked me "What shall we do?" I told them, "Repent and be baptized." This is the first serious step to the power of a changed life. Repentance is being sorry that you have sinned. Knowing that you have grieved God by ignoring him and his commandments. It is a decision to turn away from the direction you have been heading and turning toward God in the call of Christ. It is the word "metanoia." Simply "turning."

Repentance is the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. It is the prevenient grace of God helping you know that you need a Savior. This longing of our soul is now the desire to change our lives and live differently. Realizing we cannot change, we have no power to change. But giving thanks that Christ has done the work for us on the cross. And by the power of love has paid the price for our sins.

This power is still at work today. It is changing the lives of people everywhere we go. All of the disciples have spread now. It is hard to believe that only the twelve of us set out to preach this Good News. Now we are in every corner of the world, proclaiming the gospel.

Remember that the “violent” wind of the Day of Pentecost reminds us that God is always able to RE-CREATE. The Hebrew and Greek words for “wind” and “spirit” are used here. The tongues of fire remind us of the cleaning power of fire.

But above all it was the power the Holy Spirit gave us that day to COMMUNICATE. We were preaching to people from all over the world, and they HEARD the gospel in their native language. Faith was no longer a matter of differences because of geography. We were one in Christ.

This was a new day. The focus is on Jesus. Here we find that our lives are confronted by the reality of God’s way of living: turn from sin, live in the way of righteousness, and be given the assurance that our judgment or condemnation by God has been canceled.

The Holy Spirit is available for every person who comes to Christ and the Spirit has two different works that are shared: First the “fruit of the Spirit.” This is how we are made into the image of Christ: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Jesus said we would be known by the fruit in our lives. And in John 15 he said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. If you abide in me you will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.”

The second work of the Spirit in our lives is to discover that God has uniquely “gifted” us with “gifts of the Spirit.” Here we find how we can contribute to the ministry of Christ such as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working miracles, prophecy, discernment, tongues, interpretation of tongues.

I share with you my friend these words: “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received. Whoever speaks must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all

things through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 4:10-11).

The record in the Scriptures is that when a person comes into a new relationship with God their lives changes. The word is REVIVAL.

Do you remember Ezekiel? One of God’s prophets. He lived during a time of Israel’s drifting away from God. God took Ezekiel out into the desert where a great battle had been fought. Many people had died there; thousands of bones were bleached by the sun. He looked out on a valley of dry bones. And God said, “Ezekiel, can these bones live again?” And he said, “Oh, Lord God, thou knowest.”

Then God said to Ezekiel, “Prophesy to these bones. Speak my word Ezekiel.” Then the breath of God, the life-giving source, the spirit caused bones to come together. Then bones and ligaments, muscle, flesh, skin, and they stood erect. And as Ezekiel spoke God’s word, they had new life.

Do you know what happened to Jesus’ disciples on the day of Pentecost? A day of Revival. God sent his power. The Holy Spirit came, and they were filled with the life of Christ.

God is not dead. He is very much alive and waiting to involve YOU in his kingdom. You have heard the word “revival.” It means to live again.

May God give you the “revival” of that Day the Day of Pentecost TODAY, this day. For this is the DAY God hath made. Let us be “REVIVED” in it. Receive POWER.

Dr. Luke, who also authored the Gospel wrote the book of Acts. His purpose was to explain to a man named Theophilus, a Greek official, about the incarnation, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and what the Church did after the resurrection.

It could be said that is the Acts of the Holy Spirit. This book gives the Church an

eternal resource for communicating the power of the life of the Spirit.

As Jesus said, “Most assuredly I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do he will do also, and greater works than these he will do because I go to the Father.”

The end of the book of Acts has not been written. You and I are a part of the new chapter being written in our time.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Let us pray: “Dear Lord, we confess that often we have ignored or denied the power of your Son, Christ Jesus. We believe that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Grant us the power to live! Amen.”

DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL: Sermon Eight: October 20-26

Sunday:

1. How do you imagine the “tongues” of fire on the heads of the people present that day?
2. Have you thought that the “power” of Pentecost ended long ago?
3. Do you think that “Pentecost” is only for other “denominations”? Pray for understanding.

Monday:

1. Have you ever heard another Christian talk about “signs and wonders”?
2. What concerns you most about “the power” of the Holy Spirit?
3. Have you ever “prayed” to God by concentrating on the Holy Spirit?

Tuesday:

1. Have you ever witnessed or heard a sermon that you were convinced had a “special” power that could only be explained by the presence of the Holy Spirit?
2. Has the Holy Spirit ever “led” you to do something out of the ordinary?
3. Pray that the Holy Spirit will use you in a greater area of your ministry.

Wednesday:

1. Read Genesis 1:2; Isaiah 61:1; and Zechariah 12:10. What new insights did you receive?
2. Read Psalm 51:11; Romans 8:9; and Mathew 28:19. What did the text say to you?
3. Spend the rest of your time in prayer.

Thursday:

1. Read Isaiah 32:15; John 3:3-5; Romans 15:16. What did you gain?
2. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13; John 14:16. Did these Scriptures help you?
3. Think about the “illuminating” power of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; Ephesians 1:16-17.
4. Give thanks for the Holy Spirit in your prayer time.

Friday:

1. Have you found any growth in your life of prayer in the last eight weeks?
2. What is the next aspect of prayer that you are interested in?

Saturday:

Sabbath time. Rest. Relax. Rejoice in the promises of God.

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